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doctrine of the Trinity as



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OF THE
DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

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AN
EXPLANATORY VIEW
OF THE
DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY,
AS IT IS DELIVERED
IN THE SCRIPTURES.

BY THE REV. J. G. TOLLEY,
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Let the particulars be specified, wherein they (the Church-Governors) have rigorously imposed something false, or at least doubtful; and if the charge can be made good against them, they then ought, with the same zeal, to throw such Article out, as they keep the rest in.—
WATERLAND *on the Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, p. 198..

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AN

EXPLANATORY VIEW, &c.

THE subject of which I purpose to treat, is the Revealed Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And this I will do, by stating, plainly and without reserve, the opinion which I have been led to form on the matter, from an attentive and unbiassed consideration of what is delivered respecting it in the Scriptures. In what regards the essential part of the doctrine, my view coincides, as may be supposed, with that of the Church of which I am a sincere, though unworthy, minister. But in the mode of explaining it, I seem to myself to be able to place the subject in a new and more satisfactory light. And as this exposition differs considerably from the established one, it will, perhaps, be right to say something previously on the freedom which I have thus allowed myself to use in forming my opinion.

B

To those persons who understand, and rightly appreciate the true Protestant principle on which our church is founded, no apology will be necessary for this endeavour to elucidate this most important doctrine. They well know that it is to the exercise of that principle of free inquiry on the grounds of Scripture, and reason subordinately to Scripture, that we owe, under the blessing of God, our emancipation from a mass of long-continued error, and our present excellent reformed religious establishment. And they will readily admit, that it is only by a continued exercise of the same principle, on the same grounds, that we can hope to carry forward that system of doctrines and discipline, towards perfection; that it is only by temperate and suitable investigation, under heavenly protection, that the cause of truth can be established. Nothing, therefore, need be said to propitiate these persons to the present inquiry. But, as there may be, and, I believe, are some among us, who, while they deny not the justness of the principle of free inquiry, still think that the subject of our religion

has been fully canvassed, and that what is already settled, is all that can be done in it with any thing of certainty, and who are, consequently, averse from any discussions with a view to the improvement of our religious tenets ; to such persons it may be expedient to offer some prefatory remarks, which may satisfy them respecting the propriety, utility, and safety of the proposed investigation. In the first place, then, it may be asked, whether it is reasonable to think that our ancestors who established the Reformation (I speak of it as finally settled by our articles), should have been able, immediately, to emerge from their then state of gross ignorance and error into one of perfect knowledge and of pure truth. Indeed, the history of the Reformation itself, is direct proof to the contrary ; for it is well known that it was only gradually that our present system of doctrines was produced. Some of the most celebrated of the first Reformers continued, to the close of their lives, to hold many erroneous notions. This was, especially, the case with regard to the now exploded tenet of

transubstantiation. Of this circumstance, the controversial writers of the Romish church have not failed to avail themselves, in order to support their opinions with the consenting testimony of those justly revered men in their favour. And, certainly, this they may very well do, unless we admit that the discovery of truth is progressive; and that, consequently, in complex matters which do not admit of demonstration, there is no sure dependence, except in the case of inspired persons, that the opinions of any man, or of any body of men, at any fixed period, are free from all error, however great may be their talents, or whatever excellence of virtue they may possess. But, again, it may be asked, how Protestants can, with consistency, endeavour to restrict the course of inquiry pursued on just grounds, when our present system itself has resulted from it? If the tenets established at the Reformation, are to be made an unalterable standard for all those who come after, what would this be, but to have displaced Papal tyranny from its throne, in order to set up, in its stead, a dominion, which, though less

ostentatious and presuming, would be, at least, equally arbitrary in its decisions? It is said, indeed, by some, that by the full scrutiny which we have made into the subject, we have arrived at a moral certainty respecting it, which, so far, precludes the possibility of error. But this, I think, can hardly be maintained as to the doctrine in question, when it is considered what room there is for mistake in so complex a subject as this, and in reasoning on which, both the premises and the inferences depend on so many particulars, that are by no means plain and evident. And, though, it be admitted, that we may arrive at a certain assurance with regard to the justness of the inferences we draw, yet we cannot, I apprehend, be in all cases equally sure, that we have laid down our premises rightly. But such claim to impossibility of error is virtually disowned by our Church, for itself, in the 19 Art. in which it is asserted, that, "as the Churches of Hierusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred, so also, the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manners of ceremonies,

but also in matters of Faith." For while we assert this of those most famous Churches, we cannot but admit that we are ourselves equally liable to error; at least, we must admit that our decisions are, equally with theirs, amenable to be tried by the evidence of Scripture and reason, and must ever so continue. The utmost that can be claimed for it, or, indeed, is claimed for it by its most judicious advocates, is the having arrived, by a well-conducted investigation, at such a degree of certainty in scriptural knowledge, that its decisions are entitled to be received as true, unless by further inquiry, they can be proved to be faulty. No other claim than this has any support either from reason or Scripture. Neither could it have; since its effect could be only to fortify error, and to check the growth of truth. The Divine intention, on the contrary, would seem rather to have been to promote a disposition for inquiry, as may be inferred from the circumstance, that so little is explicitly stated in the Scriptures respecting the Christian doctrines—nothing more,

indeed, than is strictly necessary to excite attention, and to guide the pious believer in his meditations.* This mode of pro-

* If the matter be well considered, I think it will appear that the essence of our religion, is contained in the tenet which St. Paul states, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, (ii. 2.) to be the sum of his preaching, viz. that Jesus is the Messiah crucified for the sins of the world; for, from this primary tenet, every thing relating both to doctrine and practice may be deduced by reflection. This seems to be all that is directly delivered, the other doctrines being only incidentally implied. And as this tenet must be made known by the mere prevalence of Christianity, even if there were no written documents on the subject, our religion is to be considered as intended to stand, mainly, on the footing of an oral tradition. In this view of the subject, the Scriptures of the New or Old Testament are not, then, the source of our religion, but a collateral evidence of the truth of this tenet, and an authorized divine exhibition of the particulars included in it. This would account for the circumstance, that the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, have been suffered to come down to us without an infallible proof of their authenticity. It has been left to us to make this out, in every particular case, by reasoning, and a due consideration of the evidence, as it stands. And the primary argument applicable to this point, is, that nothing can be admitted to be authentic that contradicts this fundamental tenet. This circumstance of the absence of all positive sanction to the Scriptural canon, exhibits the divine origin of our religion in a most striking point of view; since, its general prevalence, under such a circumstance, cannot be otherwise accounted for: more especially, when it is considered, that it has, thus, triumphantly prevailed against the divinely established institutions of the Jews, or,

ceeding seems to be altogether suitable to such a scheme of instruction and discipline as the Christian, of which the main end is to influence the human mind, and to bring it into a due and willing subserviency to the Divine. That this freedom of inquiry and unfettered condition of the mind, are, in no respect, prejudicial to religion, and that they are consistent with the close union which the Christian system absolutely requires between its members, might, if necessary, be plainly shewn. But it will be here sufficient to observe, that Christianity, as a divine truth, can have nothing to apprehend from discussion, but may

to use Scriptural language, that "things that are not, have brought to nought things that are," 1 Cor. i. 20. And this mode of delivering the religion, is most suitable to its spiritual character, because its reception is thus made to be purely a voluntary act of the mind, exercising all its powers of reason fully, and freely, in submission to the Divine Will; with a just regard, indeed, to all contingent circumstances, but still, ultimately, to nothing else except as it is found to be included therein. This view of the mode in which our religion has been delivered, will best explain why there is no infallible authority in the Church for doctrine, and justify the Protestant principle on which our Church has been established, as it will be found that such infallible authority is not requisite.

expect the greatest advantage from it, provided it be conducted with temper and, gravity, and the reverence due to the subject; and that it cannot be the means of creating disunion among Christians, if it be regulated, as it ought to be, by that spirit of mutual conciliation, which is inculcated throughout the New Testament. So far otherwise is the case, that it may be regarded as the best, or, rather, the only human means of producing perfect unanimity among them. When, therefore, it is evident that the inquiry is made in honesty and singleness of mind, with a sincere wish of finding out the truth for its own sake, and with a view to its practical beneficial results, it would be both contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and unjust to the inquirer, to seek to impede his efforts by casting reflections on his intentions, and denouncing his labours as tending to schism, or to the unsettling of religion or of the Establishment. There is every reason to conclude, that if our Reformers had continued their inquiries, they would have done more than they have in the way of reformation. It is

true, that they did nothing respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, but left it as it was then received, and had been, as it would appear, generally understood in the early times of Christianity. But, then, it is to be observed, that their attention was, in the first instance, directed to, and, indeed, engrossed by those doctrines of the Romish Church which had the most injurious influence on public morals. Of this kind was the doctrine of Transubstantiation, connected, as it is, with that of Purgatory and the practices of private masses and indulgences. It was the scandal occasioned by these and other vicious practices of the Romish Church, which formed the first justifiable ground of inquiry into its claim of infallibility ; and the first object of the Reformers naturally was to suppress these things. Having succeeded in that respect, and not having the same strong motive to urge them on, they proceeded no farther ; and interfered not with such doctrines as had not an immediate connexion with the vices of the Romish Church, but retained them as they were then received. This was

the case with the doctrine of the Trinity, and of which, therefore, they were not led to entertain any doubts. Indeed, their plan was to evince as much moderation as possible in the work of reform, and consequently, rather to do too little than too much. To this moderation it would be uncharitable not to think, that they were mainly induced by a just sense of the caution requisite in the momentous work which they had undertaken. But it may, also, be ascribed in some measure, to that feeling of undue submission to established opinions, to which they had been so long habituated that they feared to do violence to it, and, indeed, could not be induced to do so without an urgent necessity. Nor are they to be greatly blamed for this; since a regard for received opinions is an excellent, or rather, the only true principle of action, provided it be duly controlled by reason.*

* The proper distinction seems to be, that, in points of doctrine, submission to ancient and ecclesiastical authority can be properly required, only on conviction that the doctrines are supported by the Scriptures; but that, in matters of discipline and indifferent customs, the spirit of our religion would induce a reasonable compliance with every thing, that may promote order and good-will among Christians.

But it is clear, that, after they had once established the right, or rather, the duty of free inquiry, there was nothing to hinder their proceeding to examine into any of the received doctrines. And, though, in doing this, they would have a just respect for the judgment of the Church, and would allow due weight to the opinions of antiquity, yet, according to the true Protestant principle, they would have felt themselves, ultimately, bound only by the word of God. Had the model set by these first Reformers been rightly followed up, the work of improvement would have gradually proceeded to perfection. Instead of which, the general practice since has been, to acquiesce in their decision as perfect, and to apply all our learning and talent, solely, to the defence and support of what was then done. Now, great and admirable as were the labours of those devout characters, this is not what they themselves could have approved of, consistently with their own principles. It is remarkable, however, that, notwithstanding this general passive acquiescence in the doctrines as laid down by the Reformers, incidental observations are

to be met with in writers of the highest authority, which plainly evince that they had made further advances in divine knowledge. Instances of this, I shall have occasion to produce, presently, in considering the doctrine of the Trinity. But I shall here only observe, that it may be looked upon as the natural effect of Scriptural study and meditation. And, though the writers themselves have not, in these cases, pursued these notions to their full extent, yet they have left them as useful hints, which it remains for us to work upon. These remarks, I conceive, will sufficiently justify an endeavour, by cautious reasoning, to give additional light to the truths of our holy religion.

At the same time, it may, on the other hand, be very fitly argued, that, considering the laboured investigation of Scripture on which our present creed is founded, it is not likely that a different result would be produced by further inquiry. Or, at least, it may be said, that its principal outline must always remain as it is. Nor could this be properly objected to, since the prin-

ciples of our present system are, in the main, derived from the declarations of Scripture taken in their plain, and unforced sense. So far they must be admitted to stand on the firmest footing, and from which it is reasonable to presume they cannot be removed. Those persons, therefore, are not to be blamed who think that any proposition tending to subvert our established tenets is to be received with considerable distrust. The caution and industry which have been employed in forming our creed fully justify this confidence in its general correctness. But yet, as all human works are liable to imperfection, there can be no good reason for supposing it incapable of improvement. Though it is professedly and in the main founded on Scripture, yet, possibly, upon further inquiry, it may be found not to be as much so as it might be. The continued reflection which, in the lapse of time, is successively applied to the subject by different persons, may naturally be expected to place some things in a clearer light. A closer attention can thus be given to the particulars of

a system than could be done at its formation. And it should be observed, that these improvements which result from after-reflection, are of the utmost importance. They are like the finishing touches of a picture, from which, though in themselves perhaps minute, the picture itself derives its perfectness and real value. There is this difference, however, between the cases; in matters of design, these last improvements imply superior science and skill in the artist, but in matters of reasoning they are frequently the reward merely of patient reflection on a system already established, and of the pursuit of a previous train of argument to its remoter consequences. The proposing of them, therefore, is not to be thought presumption, or an affectation of superior knowledge and sagacity. Generally speaking, indeed, they are overlooked by persons whose pretensions are of the higher order, and are wrought out by those who find it safest to pursue their inquiries in a more restricted and cautious manner, who, feeling a constant necessity for a guide, submit implicitly to its directions;

and in the case in question, therefore, instead of trusting to general reasoning, confine themselves strictly to the track of Scripture. Neither should it be hastily supposed to originate in motives of hostility, since it may, with equal probability, arise from a friendly feeling. And, therefore, in every case, in which new and improved views of any doctrine are proposed on just grounds, they are entitled to a candid and friendly consideration: and, certainly, by this means the interests of truth would be best promoted.

If any one should suppose, that a Minister of the Church of England is precluded from further inquiry, I would, in answer to such supposition, offer to his consideration, the 20th Article of our Church. It is therein stated, “The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith: and, yet, it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness, and

a keeper of holy writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so, besides the same, ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of salvation." Now, if the latter part of the Article, which admits that "yet it is not lawful," &c. is not merely a set of words, it must be understood to reserve to the members of the Church, this right of farther inquiry, and of pointing out what may appear contrary to Scripture or superadded to it. Indeed, it is not easy to see how the language could have been more aptly framed for the twofold purpose, of asserting the right of the governors of every Christian society constituting a Church to form its own creed, and of leaving it at the same time open to its members, or rather of inviting them* to suggest such corrections in it, as may be the result of a further diligent examination of Scripture. And, certainly, it is from the studies and diligence of the clergy that

* That such was the opinion of Dr. Waterland may be inferred from the quotation prefixed to this tract. And if he is not the first authority in our Church, he is at least among the first, and especially on the subject in question.

these improvements are naturally to be looked for. It is true that the Ministers of our Church are solemnly engaged to preach its established doctrines; and, therefore, could not do otherwise consistently with their engagements. This will be readily admitted. Or, rather, I should, for my own part, be disposed to say, that not only are they prevented by their engagements from preaching any other doctrines, but neither could a Minister retain his office, who should entertain any doubt as to the substance of the established doctrines. On no other ground than this, as I conceive, could his signature to them be said to be justly complied with. And, further, the substance of the doctrines should not be estimated in a general and lax way, but in the strictest sense. For instance, with regard to the doctrine in question, it would not be sufficient that he entertained a belief in God, generally, under the notion of a Trinity, unless he also believed the three persons to be all equal and of one substance. This is what our Church maintains to be clearly deducible from Scripture; and of this it re-

quires an unequivocal belief from all subscribers to our Articles. But, as it is certain that the Scriptures have not explained the mode in which this equality of the three persons and the unity of their substance, is to be understood, the Church cannot be supposed to set forth its own explanation of the subject, positively. And, therefore, in that respect, the matter must be deemed to be left open to investigation. At the same time, the purposes of Christian edification and the just deference due to Church authority, require that no authorised Minister should, in the discharge of his public functions, professedly exhibit any other than the established view of the subject. But nothing hinders that he should, through the medium of the Press, in which case he speaks solely on his personal influence and responsibility, offer to the public judgment the matured fruits of his own reflections and study of the Scriptures ;* and it can-

* See Hey's *Norrisian Lectures*, Book iii. ch. 15. sec. 5. Dr. Hey's remarks on improvements in religion, deserve the greatest attention. The observations, here, are adapted to the present advanced condition of our Church, which affords greater facility to improvement.

not be objected to him, as a defect in his submission to lawful authority, that he supports his opinions with temperate and respectful though free discussion. Nor, on the other hand, can his retention of his office lay him open to an imputation of insincerity, since, in substance, he admits the received doctrine, and of the truth of his own view there is not an absolute certainty, any more than there is of the established one. And, assuredly, it must be admitted that he provides a better security for the prevalence of the truth ultimately, by thus giving his support to established authority, than he could hope to do by relinquishing his connexion with his Church, and taking up a hostile position against it.

I am well aware of the greatness of the difficulty which I have undertaken to encounter, in attempting to produce a satisfactory explanation of the doctrine in question. I am aware, also, of the stores of learning and the powerful talents with which it has been assailed without success. I am aware, too, that if it could not be successfully encountered otherwise than by the use of such

ponderous armour, it would be in vain for me to engage in the contest, for I have them not; and with the loan of these things, I should only be encumbered. But if I may hope to contend with success, armed only with such a competent share of learning and talent as may be sufficient to take a clear view of the case, and with a firm confidence in the divine blessing on a sincere and patient endeavour to find out the truth, by adhering the in the inquiry closely to the track of Scripture, then am I ready to engage without distrust of the event. And if, then, I venture, with only a few smooth stones and a David's sling, to encounter this giant difficulty which has so long defied the warriors of Israel, let me hope, that it may not be ascribed to "pride and naughtiness of heart," that I have had the courage to join the camp. Perhaps, I may be allowed to say, in my defence, in the words of David, on the occasion to which I have, with unfeigned humility, alluded, "Is there not a cause?" Is it not well known, that the doctrine in question, as now explained, is a stumbling-block to many apparently well-disposed persons without our communion,

and who are prevented by it from uniting with us? and, is it not equally certain, that there are many among us, who, though they receive the doctrine, generally, on the warranty of Scripture, would, yet, be well pleased, or, more strictly speaking, are anxious for a clearer and more satisfactory explanation of it? An honest endeavour, therefore, to remove the objections of the one class, and to strengthen the convictions of the other, cannot but be praiseworthy. It is upon these principles, and with these designs, that I enter upon the explanation of the view which I have formed to myself of this very weighty doctrine. In giving which, it is my earnest prayer that I may be enabled so to express myself, as may not be, altogether, unsuitable to a matter involving in itself contemplations of so grand and awful a nature.

That the Godhead is represented in Scripture under three differences, appears to me to be a fact so clear as hardly to admit of a doubt. A great variety of passages, indeed, might be produced, which go clearly to the proof of this point. But it will be sufficient to notice the words of the Bap-

tismal form. According to this, we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Now, as God is the proper and exclusive object of worship, our baptism, it should seem, must have reference to him; and, therefore, the being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost would, necessarily, be a baptism in the name of God. I conclude, therefore, from this form of introduction to Christianity, that it is the design of the Gospel that we should regard the Deity under these three distinctions.*

* As this is the received sense of the text in our Church, it is unnecessary, as far as the argument is addressed to them, to give any more particular reasons for so understanding the passage. With regard to those who dissent from the above conclusion, they will admit, at least, that these three terms, if not necessarily, may, possibly, relate to the Godhead. And if they will admit this for argument-sake, I am inclined to hope, that the way in which it is proposed to understand the terms in reference to God, may, perhaps, reconcile them to the doctrine of the Trinity. And I may here observe once for all, that what is said respecting the sense of this text, may be applied, in general, to all other texts, in which I follow the received interpretation in preference to any different ones, which may have been proposed. The received senses may be admitted, at least, on the footing of argument, inasmuch as there is no infringement of the rules of grammar in them.

But, admitting this point, it then becomes a question, in what way these expressions are to be applied in relation to God. For it must be kept in mind, that this is not explicitly stated in the Scriptures, but is left to be deduced by reflection and reasoning. No express explanation whatever is given, why God is spoken of, as he is in the above form, under the three designations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The inference that God is to be so considered, which may be drawn from that passage, is the most direct; but it is also deducible, though less directly, from what is said, in other places, concerning our Saviour Christ and the Holy Ghost. Still, it is only by reasoning and inference that the point is to be made out. This being so, it is clear that the only sure way of proceeding in the inquiry, is to search out the true meaning of all the passages which bear upon the subject by a diligent examination of the context; and, by a comparison of them together, so to interpret them that they may all give a consistent sense. Conformably to this plan, I propose to consider some of the chief

passages in which God is spoken of under these designations, from which it will be easy to draw the conclusion in what sense these terms are, in all others, to be understood in reference to God; after which, I will examine those places which may appear to form objections to the conclusion.

But, before we enter on the consideration of the passages, it will be advisable to notice, what appears to me, a fundamental error in our present mode of treating the matter. And this we may the rather do, as the removal of it will greatly assist in leading us to, what I conceive to be, a right view of the subject. The common opinion is, that these titles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, describe the essential nature of the Deity. But it may be asked what ground we have for supposing this to be their design; or, rather, we may ask, whether there is not something of presumption in the very supposition that God designed, at all, to reveal to us his real and essential nature. This supposition I have long considered as a most unhappy error.

I think it to be peculiarly so, as it has stood in the way of all satisfactory explanation of the subject. Since, in consequence of the matter's being, thus, made to be one wholly beyond our comprehension, it is thought a sufficient answer to every difficulty or doubt respecting it, to say, that it is out of the reach of our finite understandings to explain it; and that, therefore, we must receive it implicitly, without expecting ever to acquire any clear or distinct notions on the subject. This is the substance of the answer usually given; but, as a particular instance, we may take the following from Abp. Wake's Commentary on the Church Catechism. In answer to the Question, "How can three distinct persons so partake of the One Divine Nature or Essence, as all together to make but One God?" it is replied, "That is not my concern to explain. This I am sure, that if the Scriptures be (as we all allow that they are) the word of God, what they plainly deliver must be true, because it is in effect delivered by God; who can neither be Himself deceived, nor will deceive me. Now

that they deliver both these propositions to me, that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet, that they are not three Gods, but one God; I am as sure, as I can be of any thing that is spoken or written for my understanding. That therefore both of these assertions are true and credible I am sure. But how, or after what manner I am to understand them, so as to remove all shew of contradiction in them, this the Holy Scriptures have not revealed; nor do I therefore presume to pronounce anything more particularly concerning them.”* Now, it is clear that the confident tone of this answer, is derived, solely, from the assumption, that the three Scriptural designations of the Deity relate to the Divine Essence; and, if that could be made out to be certainly the case, the answer would be altogether proper. But as it is, merely, an opinion, arising, solely, from taking that particular view of the Scripture language, the truth of the assumption is, assuredly, a fit subject for inquiry and argument. For my own part, I

* Wake on Ch. Cat. s. xv. q. 8.

confess that it has, long since, appeared to me to be a gratuitous and unfounded supposition ; and, as I have before said, having, in its very nature, a principle of presumption. It seems to me, that the appropriate way for us to consider the matter, is, to regard these expressions as relating solely, to the circumstances under which God has been pleased to exhibit himself to us in the Christian dispensation. This, it must be admitted, is the most natural point of view to take them in ; for, assuredly, it is most natural to consider what has been revealed in the Scriptures as having an immediate and direct reference to our present state of probation, and the scheme of instruction and discipline which has been graciously adapted to it. But it cannot be argued that a revelation of the essential nature of the Deity, is a matter of this kind, since it is allowed, that it is a subject wholly beyond our comprehension ; and, therefore, as such, can have no other use than that of presenting to us a point for abstract and implicit belief: the sole advantage of which would be to impress us with a general sense of the

present limited nature of our faculties. Now, though this is a beneficial result as tending to produce in us humility, yet, this general advantage is not such as to preclude us from entertaining a view of the subject which may seem more consonant to the spirit and manifest design of our dispensation; viz. to exercise our minds, and strengthen our faith and devotion, by supplying us with subjects of reflection suitable to our present condition. But, on the other hand, by restricting, as proposed, the application of the terms to the existing circumstances of Christianity, we, at once, remove the objection which has been made to the doctrine of the Trinity, on the ground of the impossibility of understanding it: and which I cannot but consider to be an objection of weight. It is said, indeed, in answer to it, that there are many things in nature which are equally beyond the reach of our understanding to explain, but of the truth of which we nevertheless entertain no doubt, and on which we daily act in the affairs of ordinary life. This is true; but then it is to be observed,

that, in such cases, we know at least what is immediately necessary for enabling us to act, which is sufficient for our purpose. Greater knowledge on the subject might give us more enlarged views; but, yet, as we can act without them, it may be dispensed with. This may be instanced in the case of the Mechanic who is able to apply, in practice, the principles of a science of which he knows nothing. But, then, it should be remembered, that of a spiritual dispensation, as is the Christian, the direct end and purpose is to influence and improve the mind; and that therefore, it is natural to suppose, that its doctrines would be so contrived as to have a direct and immediate tendency to effect that purpose: for, indeed, without this, it would be inefficient and nugatory. But, then, unless its doctrines are of a character to come, at least, in some measure, within the power and range of our present state of intellect, its main design would not be answered. Let me not be misunderstood. I do not intend to say, that it is to be expected that every thing in Religion would be perfectly plain and

intelligible to us in our present state ; but what I mean to say, is, that it may be expected, that the declarations of Scripture respecting any doctrine proposed to our belief, would be so far conformable to our present mode of thinking as to form a reasonable subject for reflection ; and upon which we may hope, under the Divine blessing, by continued and devout meditation, to acquire, gradually, clearer ideas.

But if the sincere inquirer after the truth, however inclined he may be to patient and laborious research, is notwithstanding to be met, at the outset of his inquiry into the doctrine, with the declaration, that it is out of his power to understand it, the effect will naturally be, to destroy the influence which a prospect of being enabled, by meditation, to obtain an insight into it, would otherwise have on his mind. And, then, instead of being an enlivening principle of belief, it would be merely of the nature of a positive assertion, to which it only remained for him to give a passive and implicit assent. This, it is to be feared, is the case with many well-disposed Christians, in regard to the

doctrine of the Trinity: and the cause of it I believe to be this very circumstance, that they are taught to look upon it as a matter so entirely out of the reach of their apprehension, that they feel little inclination to make it a subject of habitual reflection. The consequence of which is the manifest lukewarmness respecting it, which prevails among the nominal professors of Christianity. It will not be denied, that the doctrine in question, might, even under these circumstances, if known to be founded directly and certainly on divine authority, be, still, highly useful to practical purposes, though it could not be expected to be as much so, as if it were a matter more level to human apprehension. But, as the case really is, that the doctrine is deduced only by inference, it appears to rest, chiefly, on human opinion, and its influence is, in consequence, thereby, in a much greater degree, weakened. It may be observed farther, that it is by no means consonant to the spirit of the Gospel, to check inquiry. On the contrary, its design would rather appear to be, to give it every

encouragement. “Search the Scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they (are they which) testify of me,”* was the injunction of our Lord to his Jewish auditors. And though this order, in its immediate reference, related to the prophetic declaration of him as the Messiah ; yet, in its spirit, it is clearly applicable to us, and to the pursuit of our inquiries, on just principles, into all the circumstances of revelation. The promise, also, made by our Lord to his Apostles, that, after his departure, the Holy Spirit, acting as their mental Comforter, should guide them into all truth, may be fitly applied, in its due proportion, as a general encouragement to all Christians to continue in a persevering inquiry into all the doctrines of revelation. Further, when we find St. Paul saying to Timothy, “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine,

* John v. 39.

for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,"* we cannot but consider the observations as intended to encourage him to a close and accurate study of the Scriptures ; and, by consequence, implying an assurance, that, as they are so studied and reflected upon, a clearer and more satisfactory knowledge of divine things may be attained. And though it is true that these remarks are made in allusion to the Jewish Scriptures, and are addressed to him as a teacher, yet, whoever has rightly noticed the concise mode in which the sacred writers deliver their precepts, will readily perceive that they are, in due proportion, applicable also to the canon of the New Testament, and as a direction, in this matter, to every Christian disciple. More especially will this be the case, when it is considered that a suitable degree of study is requisite, on his part, to enable him to benefit by the instructions of his teachers. On this circumstance is founded St. Luke's com-

* 2 Tim. iii. 15—17.

commendation of the people of Berea for daily searching the Scriptures, in order to ascertain whether the things preached to them, were as they were stated to be.* It is true that St. Peter has told us, that in the Epistles of Paul "there are some things hard to be understood,"† yet he has not said that they are quite beyond our comprehension. Nor has he, or any other of the Apostles, made any such assertion respecting any part of what has been revealed, concerning the Gospel-scheme of Redemption. On the contrary, I will venture to say, that whoever sits down to the study in singleness of heart, and a real desire to know the truth, will, under God's blessing, find himself so impelled by the course of the study itself, that he will have neither inclination nor inducement to stop in the pursuit; but will rather press on, continually, to the acquisition of further knowledge, with a constant hope of arriving, in the language of the Apostle, at the degree of knowledge on divine subjects, suited "to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature

* See Acts xvii. 11.

† 2 Pet. iii. 16.

of the fulness of Christ;”* or, in other words, to the perfect knowledge and practice of the Christian scheme. And though this be not attainable in this life, yet these expressions clearly give a hope, that he may gradually acquire such clear and definite notions on the subject of his religion, as may fix him immoveably in his profession, or, as the Apostle adds in the next verse, “that we may be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”†

I must entreat the reader to bear in mind, that these remarks are made, solely, on the ground that there is no explicit declaration in Scripture, that the designations in question describe the essential nature of the Deity; for I trust that it is impossible that I could rashly venture against a positive statement of Scripture, even to hazard a conjecture in what way a revelation might be best delivered to mankind. Were the matter directly stated, all argument on the subject would be at an end. Had it pleased God, that any doctrine, wholly out of the

* Eph. iv. 13.

† v. 14.

reach of human intellect to understand, should be openly delivered under divine sanction, none would more readily receive it than myself, nor with a deeper sense of self-abasement. Nor should I hesitate to believe that it was done for a wise and good purpose, however inscrutable that purpose might be to our limited faculties. But such is not the case here. It is not, nor can it be contended, that there is any positive declaration on the subject in question. The opinion, I repeat, has arisen, solely, from a particular view of the language of Scripture ; and, this being so, it is altogether a fit matter for consideration, whether or not the opinion be well-founded. And what I have aimed at by these remarks is, in the first instance, to shew that it is not probable that it is, inasmuch as it appears that such could not be the true meaning of these designations, consistently with the general tenor of the Christian scheme of redemption.

This mode of treating the subject being, in my opinion, the chief obstacle to the right understanding of it, the removal of

this impediment was requisite previously to the consideration of what I believe to be the more just view of the matter ; from which I trust it will appear, that no such assumption is necessary. This I now proceed to explain, on the principle above stated ; viz. that of interpreting the passages in which these designations occur, in direct reference to the circumstances under which it has pleased God to exhibit himself to us in the Christian dispensation. Taking the passages in the regular order, I will treat, first, of those in which God is spoken of as a Father ; secondly, of those which describe him under the title of Son ; and, thirdly, of those in which he is presented to us by the term of the Holy Spirit. And first then, of the passages in which God is spoken of as a Father.

I have, elsewhere,* observed, that the doctrines of Revelation, though of a spiritual nature, and in their ultimate reference relating to a spiritual state, have, with a due regard to general instruction, been delivered to us, not in terms applicable to that

* See Parap. 1 Cor. ii. 13. note.

state of existence, but in such as are agreeable to men's ordinary mode of thinking, being taken from images and notions in nature and real life; but, that it is only as the Scriptural phrases are gradually divested of their bodily and worldly meaning that spiritual knowledge is acquired, and the real meaning of the doctrines ascertained. The true method, therefore, of interpreting the doctrines of Scripture, is by considering them spiritually. This I believe to be the case with all the doctrines, but it is most especially so as to the one in question, since it relates immediately to Him, who has been styled, on the highest authority of our religion, emphatically "a Spirit!"* But in this there will be no difficulty to those whose minds are properly habituated to such views; because, though we can form no precise notion of things purely spiritual, yet we can form a sufficient one of them for ordinary and popular purposes, from what we may conceive generally of the mind as distinct from the body: which, indeed, is to us the appro-

* John iv. 24.

priate type, if I may so speak, of the Deity. All, therefore, that we have to do, is to apply what is said in these passages in reference to God, in that point of view; and this may be competently done by every person of common reflection. Conformably then to this plan, when God is spoken of under the relation of a Father, we must transfer the meaning of the term from what it expresses in ordinary life to the mind. And we must understand it, therefore, as signifying such an influence on the mind, as produces or begets in it new ideas and a new disposition. This use of the term will be better apprehended by considering the use of it in this way as applied among men. It is in this sense that St. Paul applies the term to himself in regard to the Corinthians, of whom he declares himself to have been "the spiritual father,"* meaning, as is usually understood by those expressions, that he had converted them to Christianity. By this means Paul was properly the immediate cause or spring of their new condition of mind, just as a

* 1 Cor. iv. 14, 15.

father is the source of life to a son born in the natural course of generation. It is true that in the figurative use of the term it may be applied generally to any thing which produces another, but when used in regard to men, the appropriate idea conveyed by it is that of influencing and guiding the mind. Thus the patriarch Joseph, describing the ascendancy which he had obtained over the mind of the king of Egypt, says, "God hath made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."* On the same principle of implying mental direction, the elder prophets were addressed by the title of Father, by the younger ones, who were called their sons. That this title was not used, in this case, though it often may be in familiar language, merely, as a general term of respect, may be inferred from the relative situation of the elder prophets, who were expressly the instructors of the younger.† It is still more evident from our Lord's direction

* Gen. xlv. 8.

† See Campbell on Gospels, Dissert. vii. p. 2. s. 3. 10.

to his disciples,* not to arrogate to themselves the titles of Rabbi, Master, or spiritual leader and Father. These titles have, all clearly, in that place, a reference to the power of primarily producing a new condition of mind. That men might, in a subordinate sense, and relatively to Christianity, take the title of Father, is clear from the practice of St. Paul, as just now quoted from his first Epistle to the Corinthians. And I may add, that it is conformably to this limited meaning, that Abraham is properly styled the Father of the faithful, or of believers in Christ;† inasmuch as it was in consequence of his faith, that the promise of the Redeemer was given to him and to his seed: so that he is, properly, by virtue of the covenant made with him sub-ordinately to the Christian dispensation, the human source of Christian faith. And, accordingly, St. Paul tells the Jewish converts of Galatia, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise;”‡ that is, if they had a true

* Matt. xxiii. 7—9.

† Rom. iv. 16.

‡ Gal. iii. 29.

Christian disposition of mind produced in them through the medium of Christian instruction, whereby they might be spiritually termed the seed of Christ, they would, consequently, be, also spiritually, the seed of Abraham, and have the same excellency of faith with him, and so be entitled to the promises made to him. But the subordinate covenant on which those promises are founded, being originally made with him, he is properly, though remotely, their spiritual father. On this same notion of mental influence, is founded John the Baptist's reproof of the Pharisees; "think not," he observes, "to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;" that is, to produce, by supernatural means, persons, who, through the covenant made with Abraham subordinately to the Christian dispensation, should attain the same excellency of faith with him: and which these Pharisees not possessing, they could not properly call Abraham their father, in that sense, though they might in the ordinary

meaning of the word, as the parent from whom they had descended in the course of nature. These passages are sufficient to shew the spiritual meaning of the word Father, as applied, figuratively, from one man to another. Now, it is in a similar, though much higher and more extensive sense, than we must apply the term when used of God. God, as the maker of the world and all its contents, is, properly, the Creator of all mankind ; and as having universal dominion, is properly, God of all men ; but it is of those only who are under his direction, whether in a greater or less degree, that he is properly called the Father. Thus we find in the patriarchal history, that good men, persons acting generally, though imperfectly, from a principle of obedience to God, are styled “sons of God,” to distinguish them from the wicked, persons acting in disregard of that principle, who are called “sons of men :” as the descendants of Seth are named in opposition to the race of Cain. For this, according to the best interpreters, is the meaning of the text, “The sons of God saw the daughters of

men ;”* and which interpretation is supported by a comparison with Gen. iv. 36. where the historian, speaking of the family of Seth, says, “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord ;” or, as in the margin, “to call themselves by the name of the Lord.” It is, I apprehend, in the same sense that Adam is, figuratively, termed a son of God;† as acting, previously to the fall, from a principle of obedience. But it is from the Jewish and Christian Revelations that the proper meaning of the phrase will best be seen. Now, we find that the Jewish nation is spoken of, collectively, as the “Son of God ;” as in Exodus iv. 22, “Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son ;” and again, in the prophecy of Hosea, xi. 1. “When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” They were so called, because, through the Mosaic Institution, they were under the divine government. And in the Christian dispensation, we find that the phrase is applied to Christians on the same principle, of being under Divine control.

* Gen. vi. 2.

† Luke iii. 38.

Thus, St. John says, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called (the) sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."* From the latter part of which passage it is clear, that the phrase of being a son of God has reference to submission to the divine authority; for the true meaning of the phrases of not knowing us, and not knowing God, must be the not acknowledging of the principles which we profess to be governed by, and which emanate from God. Conformably to this representation, the term Father is, in both dispensations, used with regard to God under this allusion. Thus in the prophecy of Jeremiah, God is described as speaking of the repentance which would be manifested by the Israelites at the time of their restoration, in these words, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them; I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way,

* 1 John iii. 1. The original word, in the text, which we translate "sons," means properly children; or, sons in an infantine state.

wherein they shall not stumble, for I am a Father to Israel.”* And, again, in the prophecy of Malachi; God, speaking of the undutifulness of the Israelites, says, “If then I be a Father, where is mine honour?”† But, whereas in the Jewish dispensation God is spoken of as the Father of the Israelites collectively, in the Christian, he is to be regarded as the Father of every Christian individually. The reason of this special application of the term will appear, when we consider the divine designation of “the Holy Spirit;” since, it is upon the special spiritual influence attached to our dispensation, that this peculiar application of the term is founded.‡ But what we are at present concerned with is, merely, to shew that the term Father, as used in reference to God, implies mental direction. Thus St. Paul, contrasting the Christian’s voluntary obedience to God with the slavish submission of the Jew to his Law, says, “As many as are led by the Spirit of (*rather by a disposition of mind from*) God, they are *the* sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of (*a dispo-*

* Jer. xxi. 9.

† Mal. i. 6.

‡ See p. 147.

sition of mind derived from moral) bondage, again, to fear; but ye have received the spirit of (*a disposition of mind derived from*) adoption (*as sons*), whereby we cry Abba, Father.”* And to the same purport he says to the Galatian Christians, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of (*rather, the disposition of mind derived from*) his Son into your hearts, crying, (*or, leading you to cry*) Abba, Father.”† In truth, if this sense of the word be kept in mind, it will throw a clear light on all the passages in the New Testament in which it is used of God. And in confirmation of this sense, we may take the direction which our Lord has given respecting the

* Rom. viii. 14, 15. The whole passage might be thus paraphrased conformably to the context, “As many as are led by a disposition of mind derived from God, the same are sons of God. And such you naturally are, for you have not received again in the Christian dispensation, as you did in the Jewish, a disposition of mind arising from bondage to a set of positive enactments, with a view to a fear of God, but you have received a disposition of mind arising from adoption as children of God, in which disposition of mind, naturally looking up to God for direction, as children to a parent, we cry to him in our devotions by the title of Abba, Father.

† Gal. iv. 6.

application of the term to God only, in Matt. xxiii. 9. But to understand this passage rightly, it will be best to recur to the original, and to consider it in connexion with the whole of the paragraph. In our translation it is, "And call *no man* your father upon the earth; for one is your Father which is in heaven"—but the words literally rendered are, "And father call not your's upon the earth; for one is your Father, the Father in heaven." That our Lord here alludes to mental direction as implied in the term father, appears from the preceding verses. It is clear from the first six verses of the paragraph with which the chapter begins, that our Lord is speaking of the Scribes and Pharisees, as claiming to be spiritual instructors. And having in v. 7. noticed their fondness to be saluted by the title of Rabbi, as expressive of a superior knowledge of the Divine Law, entitling them to direct the mind and conduct of others, he in v. 8. says to his disciples, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master (*literally leader*) even Christ (*or the Messiah*), and

all ye are brethren." It will be observed, that our Lord does not here, as in the former verse, reduplicate the term Rabbi; and therefore, he must be understood to prohibit, not as in the former verse, merely, the ostentatious application of it, but the use of it, at all. Now, as our Lord cannot be supposed to condemn the ordinary use of the term, as employed by the Jews to signify a teacher of the Mosaic Law, we must regard the injunction, according to our Lord's usual method of teaching by obscure hints, as an intimation of the new dispensation under him, when the literal use of the term would of course cease: and as therein he would be equally the spiritual guide of all his disciples, they would all, as such, stand in an equal relation to himself, and to each other; or in other words, as an intimation that the Jewish Law was now to be set aside, and that Christ was to be henceforward, equally to them all, their leader or guide to the divine law. And, then to carry on their thoughts to God, as the author of that law, and therefore, their true and proper mental director, our Lord

adds, in the next verse just now quoted, "and father call not your's upon the earth; for one is your Father, the Father in heaven,"—or, if we supply the ellipsis, and place the words in the regular order, it would be, "call not your father upon the earth, father: for one is your Father, the Father in Heaven." Now, the phrase of "a father upon the earth," must here signify either, a natural father, or else a spiritual instructor, to whom it was usual to give that title, as being apparently, the source of the knowledge imparted. To this latter sense of the phrase, the whole context points. And the purport of our Lord's injunction, then is,—regard not your human spiritual instructor as the source of the Divine Law, for he who is properly so, is the one Heavenly Being who is the Author of it. That the term father, might, in a subordinate sense, be used of a Christian instructor is clear from St. Paul's application of it to himself, as before noticed, but it is equally so from the words of the prohibition itself: not indeed, as they appear in our common version, which is hardly

reconcilable with St. Paul's practice, but, clearly so, if we take them according to the literal and more exact rendering which I have given of the passage. Because by this, the term Father is actually used of a human spiritual instructor, styled "your father upon the earth;" and therefore, it is obvious that our Lord's design was, solely to restrain his disciples from the application of it to men in the highest sense: and this, with a view to leading them to think of God as the true source of spiritual knowledge. We may observe further, that in this sense, our Lord appears to disclaim the title even for himself, if given with an exclusive reference to his human character. And this he would do conformably with his declaration, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."* As, however, "he spake as never man spake," he claims a distinction for himself, in respect of his divine union; and so he adds in v. 10. "neither be ye called masters (*spiritual leaders*) for one is your Master (*spiritual leader*) even Christ, or the Messiah." Some persons,

* John vii. 16.

from not rightly attending to the drift of our Lord's discourse, have supposed this to be, merely a repetition of what is said in v. 8; whereas, it is a necessary assertion of his superiority as a teacher in immediate union with God. On the whole, the course of our Lord's remarks is this; in v. 8. he intimates that the Jewish dispensation and the teaching of the Rabbin were now to end, and that the Messiah was to be their future spiritual leader; in v. 9. he declares God to be the true source of all spiritual instruction; but then, in v. 10. he claims for himself the first rank as an instructor under God. And, in order to repress in his ministers, all assumption of undue control over the minds of those whom they teach, he subjoins, in v. 11. this remark, "but he that is greatest among you, shall be your servant." Where, that the expression, "he that is greatest among you," alludes to a Christian minister, is clear, both from the connexion which relates to the subject of teaching, and, also, from the circumstance, that the power of instruction is the most

natural ground for claiming superiority in a spiritual dispensation, as is the Christian. And, it is in conformity with this declaration of our Lord, that St. Paul speaks of himself and his colleagues in regard to the Corinthians, where he says to them, "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy."* Our Lord then adds in v. 12, a general enforcement of humility on all persons, "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted:" where the allusion is, primarily, to spiritual pride, but, subordinately, to every other species of it. This connected explanation of the whole paragraph, I have given as the best means of shewing the meaning of the term Father as applied to God in v. 9, which is our immediate concern. And, I think, it must be clear from this connected view, that its proper allusion, in this place, is to spiritual direction. It is used in the same sense in our Lord's Prayer. And, now, from all these passages I think that it

* 2 Cor. i. 24.

is sufficiently evident that this is its true and appropriate meaning. But we must observe, in conclusion, and in review of this part of the inquiry, that the term is thus applied to God in three different ways; First, as he is the Father, generally, of all good men, since it is he, and he only, who puts good thoughts into the mind; Secondly, as he was the Father of the Jewish nation collectively, who were properly under divine government and peculiar protection; and, Thirdly, in a more especial sense, as through the medium of Christ, he influences the minds of Christians: as will appear presently, when we treat of the designation of God as “the Holy Spirit.” Thus much for the meaning of the word Father.

Let us now proceed, and consider the principal passages in which God is spoken of as a Son. It should be observed, that the term Son can be applied to God, only through the medium of the divinely instituted scheme of redemption by Jesus Christ; and, therefore, whenever so applied, its immediate and direct reference

must be to our Saviour Christ. In order then to ascertain, in what sense God is to be considered as a Son, it will be requisite to inquire into the exact meaning of the two titles ascribed to our Lord in the Scriptures ; viz. that of "The Son of God," and that of "The Son of Man." According to the common interpretation, the title of "The Son of God," describes our Lord as having been, from all eternity, in the essence of the Godhead ; and that of "The Son of Man," is descriptive of his human nature. But, though this is the ordinary sense affixed to these phrases, and that which had obtained probably in very early times, yet we find that by later writers, and these of the highest repute for learning and sound religious principles, a different meaning is given to them. Parkhurst, in his Greek Lexicon, remarks thus on the title of "The only-begotten Son of God," as applied to Christ. "Though I am not ignorant how strenuously some great and good men have insisted, that this term relates to the *divinity* or *divine nature* in Christ, yet truth obliges me to declare, that I apprehend it *strictly* and

properly refers to his *humanity*, which, as it was *begotten of God*, was *therefore* the *Son of God*; and as *no other man* was thus begotten, was the *only-begotten Son of God*.”* And in a note he refers to Bishop Pearce on John i. 14, who explains *the only-begotten of the Father*, by *the only-begotten Son of the Father*; adding, *no man* was ever born into the world as *Jesus* was, according to Matt. i. 20. Luke i. 35.—Of these titles Bishop Horsley thus speaks, “‘Son of God’ is a title that belongs to our Lord in his human character, describing him as that man who became the Son of God by union with the Godhead; as ‘Son of Man,’ on the contrary, is a title which belongs to the Eternal Word, describing that person of the Godhead who was made man by uniting himself to the Man Jesus.”† And again he says, “‘The Son of Man,’ and ‘The Son of God,’ are distinct titles of the Messiah. The title of ‘The Son of Man’ belongs to him as God the Son; the title of

* See Parkhurst, Greek Lexicon, under the word *Μονογενής*, 2nd sense.

† Horsley’s Sermon ix.

‘The Son of God’ belongs to him as man. The former characterises him as that one of the three persons of the ever-blessed Trinity which was made man; the other characterises him as that man which was united to the Godhead.”* That these writers entertained the ordinary notion on the subject of the Trinity, as relating to the essential nature of God, there is no reason to doubt. But it is clear from the above passages, that they had in some measure, given up the proofs usually adduced for that view of the subject, which proceeds on the supposition, that the phrase of “The Son of God,” is applicable to our Lord as being originally the second person of the Godhead. The evidence for that view of the doctrine, must in their minds, have been founded on indirect inferences from some general expressions of Scripture, and from the supposed tenor of the whole of the Christian scheme. But whether it can justly be so deduced, may be questioned. I am rather inclined to regard these incidental observations, thus occurring in these

* Horsley’s Sermon xiii.

celebrated writers, as the natural overflowing of their minds in the course of their religious study and meditation ; and which, they thus threw off, without considering the effect which it might have on the received notion of the doctrine. They are, as I have before observed, instances that these writers had advanced, in divine knowledge, beyond the ordinary condition of their contemporaries, though they seem not to have pursued their notions to their full extent. Probably, if they had, they would have found it necessary to abandon the common view of the subject.* But,

* It is a singular fact, that one of the passages in Bishop Horsley's Sermons, containing this peculiar explanation of the two titles, is extracted in a note to the Family Bible of the Society] for Promoting Christian Knowledge (See note at Matt. xvi. 16., and Horsley on Matt. xvi. 18, 19. Sermon. xiii. ;) and that on comparing the note with the original, it is found that Bp. Horsley's explanation of these Titles is, in the note, directly reversed. Now, the natural conclusion from this is, that in the opinion of the compilers of the note, the editors, and revisers, and it may be added, of the readers, there would have been a discrepancy in the first and latter part of the passage, if the Bishop's explanation of the titles had not been changed. Which shews, at least, their conviction, that his explanation of them does not lead to the common notion on the subject.

as they have retained it, their explanations of the doctrine are not such as would be consistent with the view which I have proposed to take. Nevertheless, I deem the expositions which they have given of these two titles to be very useful hints, and which, if duly considered, will lead to a just explication of the subject. With regard, indeed, to the observations of Parkhurst, nothing more can be drawn from them than the general fact, that the title of "The Son of God" relates, in strictness, not to the divine but to the human nature of our Lord. For as to his notion, that it describes, merely the peculiar mode of our Lord's birth, I must judge it to be erroneous, on the ground before stated, that the right way of considering the scriptural doctrines, is to interpret them spiritually. But yet, the opinion of this much respected writer, that the phrase is used, in Scripture, strictly and properly in reference to our Lord's humanity, is an important circumstance; because, deficient as he may be supposed to have been as a critic in other respects, it will not be denied that he was

a most diligent and impartial collator of Scripture: which would fully qualify him to be a judge of this point. The exposition given of the titles by Bp. Horsley, seems to be nearer to the truth. His explanation of that of "The Son of God," as describing our Lord "as that man who became the Son of God by union with the Godhead," I apprehend is altogether just. As to the explanation of the other title, that of, "The Son of Man," I believe it to be accurate as far as it asserts, that this title relates to the assumption, in a certain sense, of the human nature by the divine; but as it proceeds on the supposition of the existence of three persons in the Divine Essence, I conceive it to be wrong. And, I cannot but think that the explanation was given by Bp. Horsley in that way, solely, from his having, previously, had in his mind that established view of the subject: for I believe, that no one has ever pretended that the phrase of "The Son of Man," as it is used in Scripture, affords by itself any ground for that particular notion. On the whole then, the chief use which I would

make of the expositions given by these eminent critics, is, to avail myself of the weight of their opinions, that the titles in question as applied to our Lord, express not what they are commonly supposed to do, but directly the reverse; that is, that the title of "The Son of God," is descriptive of the human nature, and that of "The Son of Man," of the divine. I do not, however, adopt the explanation altogether, as I think that there is an inaccuracy in thus separating the divine and human natures in the person of our Lord. Strictly speaking, if the two natures were united in his person, either of the titles, as applied to him, must contain a reference to both the natures. But yet, there seems to be this distinction, that though each of the titles equally refers to both natures, yet, in each case, respectively, there is a leading allusion to one or the other. In this way, then, I apprehend that the phrase of "The Son of God," relates to the human nature made divine, and that of "The Son of Man," to the divine nature made, in a certain sense, human. This will appear to be the case by consider-

ing the application of these terms to our Lord. Let us, then, first, take the title of "Son of God," as it occurs in the angel Gabriel's announcement of the miraculous conception, as related by St. Luke i. 26—38. "And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women. And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called (the) Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom

there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, that holy thing, which shall be born of thee shall be called (the) Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her." Now, on the face of this narrative, it must be admitted that the primary subject on which the angel's message turns, is the birth of a human being. This is clear from the opening of his address to Mary, in explanation of his salutation. The first thing that he states to her is, that she should bear a son, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus." He then states

the future greatness of this son, specifying, as the two particulars of which it should consist, first, that he should be called (the) Son of the Highest, or (the) Son of God; secondly, that he should inherit permanently the throne of his ancestor David, which should be enlarged to an unlimited extent; —“he shall be great, and shall be called (the) Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (*rather limit*).” Now there is nothing in the terms of this prediction, interpreted according to the established notions of that time, to indicate that this fruit of Mary’s womb should be other than a human being; though, certainly, one under peculiar circumstances, as the term “great” applied to him denotes, and which is explained by what follows. Let us consider each of the parts of the prediction separately. First, as to the title of “Son of God.” This, it has been already shewn, was often used of men. And used, as it is here, in the original,

without the article, there is no ground for giving it any peculiar and emphatic meaning. There is certainly none whatever for supposing that it was intended as a designation of the Deity, nor could it have been so understood by Mary. Nor yet, indeed, could it have been intended even to describe our Lord as the Messiah, or have been at the time so understood. For to suppose such an open declaration of that fact, is hardly consistent with the little expectation that his mother Mary and Joseph seemed to have formed of him; for, when at the age of twelve years he remained behind them at Jerusalem disputing with the Jewish doctors, they appear to have been as much amazed at him as any who heard him; and when he told them that he was about his Father's business, "they understood not the saying."* Moreover, it is inconsistent with our Lord's injunction at different times afterward, to keep secret the circumstance of his being the Messiah; which in that case would have been useless. It is true, that the title

* Luke ii. 42—50.

used specifically with the article, that is, the phrase "The Son of God," was afterwards applied to our Lord as the Messiah. But the way in which that came to be done, I apprehend, was this The phrase Son of God, without any article, signifies, in a general sense, a righteous person; but used with the article, definitely, it signifies the peculiar and perfect righteousness of our Lord's character, by which he was distinguished from all other men: and in that sense it was afterwards specially and exclusively applied to him. I am inclined therefore to consider the phrase "Son of God" in this place, as it appears in the original, as a general intimation of the righteousness of our Lord's character, and not as a personal title.* In

* Our translation, as I think, does not sufficiently distinguish when the definite article is omitted in the original text. Though the use of the Greek article, and the omission of it may be said to answer, in some general way, to our English definite and indefinite articles, yet by no means as a fixed rule; and very frequently, whether the article be used or omitted, the exact meaning can be determined only by the context. With regard to the use in English of the term Son, without any article as a general description of character, we have an instance of this in our translation of the Old Testa-

the next place, as to the other part of the prediction; the succession to the throne of David, of whom Mary was the lineal descendant, was sufficiently within the established course of events, not to be thought improbable. It will be admitted, indeed, that the natural interpretation of this part

ment, "Now, the sons of Eli were sons of Belial," 1 Sam. ii. xii. And that the phrase "Son of God" might be used to describe general righteousness of character, is evident from the exclamation of the Centurion at the close of our Lord's crucifixion. For in St. Matthew's account, the exclamation, literally rendered, is, "Truly this was (the) a son of God (or rather of a god according to his notions as a heathen); and in the parallel place of St. Luke, it is "Certainly this was a righteous man." This gradual application of a general term specially to our Lord, was done as to the two names of Jesus and Christ, the first of which signifies in general a Saviour; in which sense it might, in a limited degree, be applied to a temporal deliverer, whence is derived the name of Joshua, who is called Jesus in Heb. iv. 8.—and that of Christ signifies, originally, "anointed;" and so was used literally and figuratively of many different persons in peculiar and consecrated circumstances. But both these terms were afterward understood in a special sense of our Lord. Our translators, from a praiseworthy anxiety to pay the utmost honour, at all times, to our Lord, seem to have been fearful of expressing themselves, only, according to the plan which has been adopted by God of imparting divine knowledge gradually: and so have often made their translation less clear by anticipations in this respect.

of the Angel's prediction, would be to refer these expressions to the long-expected Messiah, and most probably Mary so understood them; though she would do this, rather, on the ground of hope than of certain assurance. But, even in that case, there would be no reason to suppose them to indicate any other than a human prince: for, certainly in Jewish estimation, such the Messiah was expected to be. Nor would the permanency and unlimited extent of the promised kingdom, understood as that of the Messiah, indicate according to Jewish notions, that the possessor was to be other than a human being. Mary's question to the Angel in reference to this prediction, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" if taken literally, would imply that she expected the birth to be altogether in the ordinary course of nature; but as she was betrothed to a husband, it should be considered, rather, as a distant and modest inquiry, whether the birth was to take place in an ordinary or in a supernatural manner. But it implies not that she expected that, that which was to be

born of her would be any other than a human being. At the same time, she does not appear to have turned her mind, particularly, to the consideration of that point; the chief, and apparently, sole object of her thoughts being the mode of the birth. The Angel's reply merits the greatest attention, as it will be found, if I mistake not, to contain in it more than it is usually supposed to do. The common notion is, that its purport is merely to announce the fact of a miraculous conception, and that the expressions, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee," and "the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee," are only different ways of expressing the same thing. But, certainly, such useless repetition is unusual in the Scriptures, or, indeed, in any accurate writings. I apprehend, rather, that the reply is, properly, divisible into two parts. In the first, the Angel explains to her the mode of the birth, and in the second, the peculiar circumstances in the nature of the being who was to proceed from her. Let us now see whether this be not so. Mary's observation is, "How shall this be,

seeing that I know not a man?" in answer to which, the Angel says to her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee." This I take to be the first division of his reply, and that it is intended as a direct and full answer to her question; for I believe its meaning to be, that the Divine intention,* in this respect, would take effect upon her.† This would sufficiently indicate to her that her conception was to be miraculous, and the result solely of the Divine will, without the intervention of any secondary means. And, accustomed as she was to pious meditation, she would naturally be led by it to think of Isaiah's prediction of the Messiah's birth in these words, addressed to the house of David, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son."[‡] This reference would serve both to illustrate and confirm the Angel's communication. But the Angel having thus

* The Holy Ghost or Spirit, here signifies the Holy or Divine mind. See the explanation of the phrase, in p. 144, et seq.

† For a similar meaning of the phrase "come upon thee," compare 1 Sam. ii. 34.

‡ Isaiah vii. 14.

satisfied her respecting the mode of the birth, which was the immediate object of her inquiry, goes on, in the next place, to explain to her the peculiar circumstances in the nature of the being who was to proceed from her. This forms the second division of his reply, and, accordingly, he adds, “and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also (*or it might be rendered, and for which reason*) that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called (the) Son of God.” Now, that the expressions “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee,” contain an additional communication, appears from the inference that is drawn; “and for which reason, that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called (the) Son of God.” For as God is a Spirit, the phrase “Son of God,” must be taken in a spiritual sense, as relating to the mind. Now, as far as Jesus was produced of the Virgin, he was as to both mind and body, merely, the creature of God’s will. God had before said, by the mouth of his holy prophet Isaiah, that a virgin of the House of David

should conceive, and he had declared by his Angel Gabriel that Mary should be the person in whom that prophecy should take effect, and accordingly she conceived. If it was from the single circumstance of the miraculous conception, that the Angel styled Jesus “Son of God,” then the title might be applied, in the same sense, to John the Baptist, whose birth must be considered as equally miraculous.* Indeed, it is observable, that the Angel himself adduces to Mary this very case of the pregnant condition of her cousin Elizabeth, as a proof of the possibility of her own miraculous conception; thereby placing both the events on the same footing. For he says to her, “behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible:” or, perhaps, rather—every word (*spoken*) conformably

* Our Lord, speaking of John, said, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” The natural inference from which is, that, as far as our Lord was produced of the Virgin, he was not superior to John.

to (*the will of*) God shall be possible. But if we understand the phrase "Son of God" as expressive of Divine influence on the mind, it then has an appropriate meaning; and describes Jesus, generally, according to the explanations before given, as a human being under a sense of obedience to the will of God. And with the inference thus explained, the expressions in the previous statement fully agree. For what are these expressions? "the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee." Now, "the power of the Highest" must mean the power of that Supreme Being with whom, merely to express his will, is to perform; that is, the Divine intellectual power. This power, it is said, should overshadow the mother of Jesus, or cover her as with a cloud. And, upon the principle of explaining things spiritual by things natural (which is the Scriptural one), I see not what more suitable terms could have been used for expressing the Divine influence which was about to operate on the mind of her future offspring. If it should be thought to be an objection to this explanation of

the Angel's reply, that Mary's previous question to him contains no reference to this point, it may be considered that if she understood the phrase "Son of the Highest" as it was usually applied to men, merely, as a general description of character, there was no reason for her to make any inquiry about it. But even, if she thought that something more than ordinary was implied by the expressions, the natural reserve of her character would induce her to confine her inquiry to the circumstance of the birth, which, as it so immediately concerned herself, it was in some measure necessary for her to know, and to leave the future destiny of her child to the will and pleasure of God. It is in conformity with this sentiment, that, as soon as the Angel had satisfied her that her conception was to be miraculous, she expresses her entire submission to the Divine will. "And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

It may be observed further, with regard to this phrase, "the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee," that it serves to

distinguish the birth of our Lord from that of the Baptist, which, as before noticed, the mere circumstance of a miraculous conception would not do. But by these expressions, I apprehend, it is declared that our Lord was free from the hereditary taint of our nature, but which attached to the Baptist, as it does to all other descendants from Adam. It should be remembered that Christ was himself a second Adam.* His mind was created anew. As man, indeed, he was born of the Virgin by the will of God. But then the distinction in his case was, that his mind was taken into union with the Divine: whereby it came to pass, that, as we read, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (perhaps age) and in favour with God and man,"† or, rather, in good disposition in relation to God and man; that is, the good disposition of his mind, in these respects, advanced gradually, or, rather, was developed through the Divine union, with the increase of his years and of his mental powers.

I have gone thus minutely through the

* 1 Cor. xv. 45.

† Luke ii. 52.

whole of this passage, as it is the only one in Scripture which gives a direct explanation of the phrase "Son of God," as applied to our Lord. From all which it must be seen, that the proper meaning of the phrase is to describe our Lord, not as having been originally God, but, as a human being entirely under divine influence. I am aware that this passage would not be produced by those who suppose the doctrine of the Trinity to relate to the Divine Essence, as a proof of their assertion of our Lord's being the second person in that Essence; but then it should be remembered, that, that view of the doctrine rests entirely on the supposition that the phrase *can* be so interpreted. It is a material circumstance, therefore, against that view, that the only direct explanation that we have of the phrase from Scripture, gives it no countenance whatever.

There is another passage, which, though not professedly an explanation of the phrase, shews plainly, by the circumstances under which the phrase is used in it, that the phrase is to be, in like manner, under-

stood spiritually of our Lord, as a human being. The consideration of it will both confirm and more fully illustrate the explanations which have been already given. It occurs in Acts xiii. 33, where St. Paul quotes these words of the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (which in the psalm, are spoken by God and addressed to Christ), as a prophecy of our Lord's resurrection. The whole passage stands thus, "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise (*of a Saviour*) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.' " Now, it is quite clear from this application of the passage by St. Paul, that the phrase "Son of God," is used, in this instance also, of Jesus as a human being; for in that respect only, could the circumstance of a resurrection be applicable to him. It is further evident, that it must be understood spiritually. This appears from the use of the word "begot-

ten," which should be particularly attended to. As to the supposition, that this figurative expression is to be understood in the general sense of "produced," it may be observed that such a vague use of terms is inconsistent with the usual accuracy of the Scriptures. For though, as I have before said, the spiritual doctrines of the Gospel are therein delivered to us, figuratively, in terms taken from images and notions in nature and real life, yet those terms, to be rightly understood, must be received by us in a spiritual sense, as relating to the mind; and moreover, while so applying them, we should give them as precise and appropriate a sense as possible. It is from the want of due attention to these circumstances, that we meet with so much lax interpretation of the Scriptures. In the present case, conformably to what has been said of the term Father, when applied to God, it will be right to understand the word "begotten" as expressing divine influence on the mind; and this very justly, since the resurrection of our Lord was, in the strictest sense, an event wholly spiritual. It is true, that he

appeared after his resurrection, clothed with his crucified body. This was necessary for the purpose of evincing his identity. But, assuredly, a material body could form no essential part of the glorified Saviour. It is true, also, that when our Lord ascended visibly toward heaven in the presence of his Apostles, he was, as we may conclude, clothed with the same human body. The reason for this, I humbly apprehend, was to signify openly the future exaltation of the human nature, by an emblematic representation of the fact in the person of our blessed Lord as our Head. But, that the resurrection of our Lord was, properly, a matter distinct from the re-assumption of his crucified body, may be inferred from what St. Paul says, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, of the resurrection of Christians; who, we read, are to be clothed with spiritual bodies.* And we are further told, that our blessed Lord, at his second coming, “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.”† Moreover, that our Lord’s resur-

* 1 Cor. xv. 44.

† Phil. iii. 21.

rection was a matter purely spiritual, is expressly asserted in 1 Pet. iii. 18; though this appears not so clearly in our version, as in the original. The translation in our Bible is, "for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." But it is the opinion of Bishop Horsley* and other able commentators, in which opinion I concur, that the original words, translated "by the Spirit," would be better rendered "in spirit" or "spiritually," so as to form an antithesis to the phrase "in the flesh" in the former clause. I think the passage literally rendered would be thus: "Because even Christ once suffered in the matter of sins (*committed by others*) a just person for unjust ones; in order that he may lead us forward to God, being (*accordingly*) put to death indeed in (*the*) body, but made alive in (*the*) spirit."† I think

* See Sermon xx.

† It will be seen, that though I agree with the commentators before-mentioned, in rendering the last part of this clause, "in spirit;" yet that I have retained the sense, as to the word

then we may not improperly conclude, that the phrase of "Son of God," as applied to our Lord at his birth as recorded by St. Luke, and as again applied to him at his resurrection in the passage of the Acts under consideration, is, in both cases, a designation of him as a human being under divine influence. But, it will here be proper to inquire, in what sense he is, in this passage, again spoken of as "the Son of God;" because, certainly, the preciseness of the expressions "this day have I begotten thee," naturally intimates a peculiar meaning. Of this we have no direct explanation in Scripture, nor have we reason to expect "quickened," in our translation, which those expositors would make to be, "remaining alive." The meaning, "quickened," is certainly the most natural rendering of the original word; and the change which these expositors thus found themselves under the necessity of making, forms the strongest argument against their interpretation. But this necessity, I conceive, arose solely from their being pressed by the received notion respecting the Trinity. I may here add, that I do not concur in Bishop Horsley's exposition of what follows in this passage of St. Peter's Epistle respecting the preaching of our Lord to the "spirits in prison." I am inclined to think, that, on due consideration, the meaning of that place will be found to be something very different from any explanation that has been yet given of it.

any, according to the plan pursued in it, of leaving the knowledge of the minuter circumstances of the Christian scheme to be gathered, by our own reflections, from obscure hints thrown out incidentally. But, if we duly reflect on what has been written, and putting together such things as seem to belong to the same subject, draw with just humility the proper inferences, we shall, if I mistake not, discover in these expressions an appropriate and important meaning. With a view to these things, the first matter to be considered, is the exclamation uttered by our Lord when on the cross, a little before he expired, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* If it be not wrong, as assuredly it cannot be, to interpret these words according to the established usage of language, we must naturally infer that they relate to a separation which was, at this time, to take place of the

* Matt. xxvii. 46. I am of opinion that this exclamation must be understood to have been uttered, like the prayer at the raising of Lazarus, for the benefit of the by-standers, as matter for their reflection. To suppose otherwise, would seem to be inconsistent with our Lord's constancy in his sufferings. The force of the question is in the words *why* and *me*.

mind of Jesus from that intimate union with the Divine nature, in which it had subsisted throughout his life. In this opinion we should be confirmed by recurring to the passage in the 16th Psalm, which we have St. Peter's authority for applying to our Lord; "thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell."* This delivery from Hell our Lord speaks of, in the preceding verse, as a source of joy, which implies that his condition, there, was one of, at least, incomplete happiness. And as the expiring declaration of our Lord, "It is finished,"† is a decided proof (*if any be required*), that his soul after death could not be in a state of torment, we must conclude that it was in that condition in which we believe the souls of the faithful to be after their departure from this life—a condition which our Lord has, indeed, termed being in Paradise;‡ but which from the general tenor of the gospel we must consider to be one of joyful hope, rather than of positive enjoyment. The inference, then, that I would draw from this passage of the 16th Psalm

* Acts ii. 27. † John xix. 30. ‡ Luke xxiii. 43.

connected with that one, before quoted, in which our Lord intimates the divine abandonment of him, is, that during the interval between our Lord's death and his resurrection, he existed in his human condition separated from the divine. If this be so, then the resurrection of our Lord was a re-union of the human to the divine nature, in effect similar to that which had taken place at his birth. And, in that case, the term "begotten" might, with great propriety, be employed in reference to the event of our Lord's resurrection. But it would seem to have a still more precise meaning. Our Lord was declared, at his birth, to be a Son of God, but he is here spoken of as a begotten Son. Now, from the manner in which St. Paul uses the phrase of "a begotten son," the addition of the term "begotten" would seem to express a special influence on the mind of the party so denominated. I believe that it will be found, on examination, that the persons whom St. Paul speaks of as begotten by him, are, always, those whom he has himself converted to the Christian Faith;* and whom,

* See 1 Cor. iv. 15. Philem. ver. 10.

therefore, he has, in that respect, wholly influenced. I am of opinion, then, that the two phrases, "Son of God," and "Begotten Son of God," are to be thus distinguished: the former may be used of a person who is generally and in some degree under divine influence, the latter signifies one who is altogether so circumstanced. But, it may be said, how, in this sense, could the term "begotten" be more applicable to our Lord in the latter case than in the former? I apprehend in this way. That our Lord's condition during his life on earth was a state of trial, is clear from his own declaration on the subject; *—not, indeed, a trial of that nature that the issue of it could be at all doubtful; but yet, so far a state of trial, that he was continually subject to temptation, and which he was enabled to triumph over, only, through the full supply of divine aid† which came to him by means of his union with the Divine nature: and in which supply the Divine union, as far as we can form any notion of it, consisted. His condition may be fitly regarded as an exhibition of the natural effect of the Divine

* Luke xxii. 28.

† John iii. 34.

influence when operating fully on the mind. But, then, properly to constitute a state of trial, it was necessary that this aid should be given, though at all times fully, yet only so as to meet the exigency of each occasion, without overpowering the human nature. Our Lord still continued in the exercise of his natural faculties as a human being, and in the use of the appropriate means for obtaining the requisite supply of Divine aid.* Without this, there would have been no trial, and no ground for the rewards said to be granted to him on account of his perfect righteousness; as is declared by St. Paul, in Heb. i. 9. where he applies to our Lord this passage from the 45th Psalm, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." But the re-union of the human nature to the Divine, which took place at our Lord's resurrection, was under somewhat different circumstances. The trial had now been made, and full proof given of our Lord's

* John xi. 41, 42.

perfect conformity to the will of his Father. And hence the Divine power, which before operated through him, by means of his entire submission to his Father's influence on his mind, and which, in his own language, was of the nature of a joint work,* was now to be simplified in operation; and, if I may so speak, to flow through him in one uninterrupted stream. Agreeably to which, our Lord stated, at the closing of his life, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."† This difference in the circumstances of the union at these two periods, would seem to account for the change in the terms.

I think, now, it must be clear after this particular review of this passage of the Acts, that it does not, any more than the former one from St. Luke, countenance the notion, that the phrase, "Son of God," as applied in Scripture to our Lord, relates to the Divine Essence; but that, on the contrary, it is an additional proof that the phrase is simply descriptive of our Lord as a human being under Divine influence. At the same

* John v. 17, 18.

† Matt. xxviii. 18.

time, it is easy, from what has been said, to distinguish the use of the phrase as applied to our Lord, from the use of it as applied to men in general. When employed in this last way, it can be only to express, indefinitely, the condition of being under Divine influence, as opposed to the natural condition of mankind, in which they are not so subject. In this indefinite sense, our Lord might be spoken of, generally, as being under Divine influence; and so might be termed, "Son of God," or, "a Son of God," to distinguish him from the unrighteous. But to express, specifically, his appropriate condition of being wholly under Divine influence, the proper phrase is that of "The Son of God." In like manner, the phrase "The Begotten Son of God," which signifies the same thing, is, for that reason, exclusively peculiar and appropriate to our Lord. And so, also, as our Lord is the only human being so circumstanced, he is rightly called "The only-begotten Son of God." If it be asked whereon is founded the distinction which we have given to the two expressions of "a

Son" and "a begotten Son," the answer is, that the distinction itself is derived from the usage of Scripture; that the figurative application of terms taken from natural relations to express spiritual ones, is, necessarily, in some measure, arbitrary; but that, in the present case, the distinction would seem to be founded on the difference in the relative circumstances of an adopted son, and of one who is properly such by the course of nature. In the former case, the relationship between the parties being artificial and voluntary, the union between them is more liable to interruption than in the latter, in which the union is cemented by the permanent tie of natural affection.

Having thus ascertained the meaning of the phrase "Son of God," in the passages of Scripture in which it is directly applied to our Lord, it will now be proper to consider the objections that may be raised to this interpretation. It may be said, are there not many passages in the Scriptures which speak of our Lord as being altogether equal to God, and others which intimate his pre-existence? To this I an-

swer, that assuredly there are ; but that if these passages are duly considered, they will be found to be quite consistent with the explanation which I have given of the phrase : and this I will now endeavour to shew. With regard to those texts which express our Lord's perfect equality with God, I apprehend there will be little difficulty in seeing their agreement with the above exposition. For, in truth, all that is necessary for this purpose, is to take them in their proper spiritual sense. Let us try this in a few texts, which will be sufficient to shew how all similar ones are to be understood. In John x. 30. our Lord says of himself, "I and *my* (the) Father are one;" that is, according to the original, not one person, but, though two persons, so united as to be one thing. Now, if we consider our Lord as speaking here in reference to his mind or spiritual part, it is quite clear, on the principle that our Lord was wholly under the Divine influence, that his assertion was most true and appropriate. Being thus intimately united to God or the Father, his mind was really

that of the Father ; and therefore he might justly be regarded, in a general sense, as being in every respect, and altogether one with him. But, in strictness, the context seems to direct us to understand this claim of unity with the Father, as relating to unity of power. In ver. 28. our Lord, speaking of his true disciples, says, "Neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand." And then he gives as the reason, "My Father, which gave *them* me is greater than all, and (*consequently*) no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand;" and adds, "I and *my* (the) Father are one." Whence the inference is, that neither could any one pluck them out of the Son's hand. I think, then, that it is clear that the claim here relates to a sameness of power. And, if we give an appropriate spiritual meaning to the expressions of "plucking them out of the Father's hand," they will signify, that no one will be able to withdraw the disciples from the Father's influence on their minds ; which influence is intimated in the circumstance that they are said to have been given to

Christ by the Father. For, it should be observed, that Christian faith is founded on a previous good disposition, resulting from a just exercise of reason, made effectual by God's influence on the mind; as stated in our Lord's declaration, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him."* It is to this influence on the mind that our Lord alludes, when he claims a sameness of power with the Father. But then, this influence on the minds of his disciples, is only the natural consequence of his perfect union with the Father. Again, we read, John xiv. 8, 9. "Philip saith unto him (*Jesus*,) Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.† Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, shew us the Father?" Here our Lord claims a per-

* John vi. 44.

† The meaning of Philip's request is, Point out to us something, by which we may form a definite notion concerning the Father, and then we shall be satisfied to believe all that you say with respect to him.

fect equality, and even, as to external appearance, (as far as such is possible,) sameness with the Father. But, if we interpret his meaning according to the principle before stated, that our Lord was wholly under the Divine influence, there is no difficulty in understanding that our blessed Lord, as a human being in intimate union with God or the Father, was, in word and operation, as far as related to human concerns (which is all that we have to do with), so perfect an exhibition of him, that whoever had seen our Lord, had, in those respects, and to that extent, seen the Father. And, that it is to these circumstances, as constituting the sameness, that our Lord alludes, appears from the following verses, (10, 11;) where he says, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he (*the same*) doeth the works. Believe me that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me; or else, (*but if not,*) believe me for the very work's sake." Which may be thus explained, with refer-

ence to the preceding verses; “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? (*that is, are you not convinced from what you have known of my character, which is evidently of a divine nature, that the Father and I are spiritually so united, that I am, as relating to human concerns, spiritually, a perfect representation of him?* This is the case both as to my words and as to the effects resulting from them) the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, (*speaks the words*) he (*the same*) doeth the works (*which result from them.*) Believe me, (*that is, Believe it on the credence due to my character*) that I am in the Father, and the Father in me (*spiritually so united as to be spiritually, as relating to human concerns a perfect representation of him :*) but if not (*on my personal assurance*), believe me for the very work’s sake (*on account of the divine character of the works.*) Again; in John v. 17. Our Lord claims this equality with the Father, and, at the same time declares the freedom of his own actions. “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I

work.” This passage it will be proper to consider at length with the context. The occasion and circumstances which led to this answer, was the cure performed by our Lord, on the Sabbath-day, on the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and whom he had desired to take up his bed and walk. The exercise of the art of healing, and the carrying of the bed on the Sabbath-day, being both of them things contrary to the literal interpretation of the Mosaic Law, offended the Jews, who, we read, (v. 16.) “persecuted Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath-day. But Jesus answered them, (*that is, their thoughts, for it does not appear that they said any thing,*) My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was (*according to the original, peculiarly,**) his Father, making himself equal

* See Campbell’s translation of the Gospels, and the note on this verse. That our Lord claimed God for his Father in a special sense, and was understood by the Jews to do so, is clear; as it appears that, in one sense, they themselves called

with (or, similar in nature to) God." Now, the peculiar and exclusive sense in which Jesus made God his Father, was that of claiming a knowledge of the designs of God; and so, of carrying them into execution of his own freewill; and that, like God, by means of his word only. This is the natural inference from the expressions "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It would carry us too much away from our present subject to consider, at length, the grounds for this inference. But it may suffice to observe that the plain meaning of these expressions seems to be this: I am justified in doing this act of mercy on the Sabbath-day, because I know that my Father is working in this same way to this very hour of the Sabbath-day; and, for that reason, I also work in this way: and it may, therefore, from the wording itself of the language, be concluded to be the proper in-

God their Father. (ch. viii. 41.) This they did, doubtless, in conformity with the repeated similar divine declarations (instances of which have been before noticed), though they do not appear to have understood the true purport of the term in that application.

ference. But this perfect knowledge of the designs of God, and power of executing them by verbal declarations, are things which could not be claimed by any other man. As to the case of the prophets and inspired persons, who were under an extraordinary degree of Divine influence, they were altogether passive instruments under that influence. They were still, indeed, intelligent agents, but without power to do more than receive the impressions thus divinely made upon them, and to act accordingly. And, as to persons under the ordinary degree of Divine influence, they, indeed, are properly free in their actions, but their knowledge of the Divine will is limited to the partial revelation which God has been pleased to make of it; and their power of acting, therefore, consists, solely, in obedience to the Divine impulses. On the other hand, the equality of operation with the Father which our Lord has here claimed for himself, implies, as the Jews understood it, a power of effecting, according to his own judgment, by a mere verbal declaration, the designs of God, founded on

a perfect knowledge of those designs. That our Lord possessed this knowledge, may be inferred from the phrase of being "in the bosom of the Father," applied to our Lord by St. John; and which, it is generally admitted, signifies this intimate acquaintance with the Divine counsels. And the possession of this spiritual power was evident from the manner in which he performed his miracles. We are not, however, to suppose, that this independent power, on the part of our Lord, interfered, at all, with the perfect union subsisting between him and his heavenly Father. That such an inference might be drawn from his words, our Lord himself seems to anticipate by what he adds in ver. 19; and which the historian has given as our Lord's reply to this inference, which our Lord knew that his hearers had tacitly formed in their own minds. We read, "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

That is, in plainer terms, we are to understand by the figurative expressions of the Son's doing what he sees the Father do, taken literally, that he acts according to his perception and knowledge of the Father's designs as they are communicated to him; and which he intimates that he was fully enabled to do, by the entire communication which he received of them; adding, "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel."* Now, it is clear, that there is nothing, in all this, inconsistent with the opinion, that our Lord here speaks of himself as a human being under Divine influence; only, it is to be observed, that he does it conformably to his Divine union; whereby he was

* What these greater works were, do not immediately appear. Perhaps, there is an allusion to the greater works done by the disciples, after our Lord's ascension (John xiv. 12.); and which, as they were done through our Lord's authority, may not improperly be said to be done by him. But whatever the works alluded to might be, I apprehend that the intention is to signify, that the works would be done freely of our Lord's own power, according to his knowledge of the Father's designs.

united to the Deity in a way that no other man was, and which made him to be altogether one with the Father. Agreeably to which, God is introduced, in the prophecy of Zechariah,* speaking of him as a man in a state of equality with himself, in a passage which is appropriated to our Lord on his own authority:† “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow (or my equal), saith the Lord of Hosts.”

I think that it is unnecessary to pursue further the consideration of the texts of this import; as it must be sufficiently apparent from the above, how all similar ones are to be explained. It must also be equally clear, that, on the principle of the perfect union subsisting between the man Jesus and the Divine nature, which makes him equal to and one with the Father, all the attributes belonging to the Divine nature, as eternal existence, creative power, omnipresence, omniscience, and the like, may properly be ascribed to him as a

* xiii. 7.

† Mat. xxvi. 31.

human being under that circumstance. This necessarily follows from the character of the union; because, though these qualities belong, in strictness, to the Divine nature, yet as, in his case, the two natures, the divine, and the human, are inseparably united under the visible form of the human, they may, it would seem, be justly spoken of as belonging to that nature, by which they are ostensibly possessed and exercised. On the same principle, it would be equally proper that our Lord should receive Divine worship, since that homage would be paid to him, not merely as a man, but as a human being so united with the Deity as to be one with him. If these things are duly considered, there will be no difficulty in rightly understanding the purport and meaning of all those texts, in which the Divine perfections are ascribed to our Lord, and the corresponding Divine dues are claimed for him.

We have next to consider the texts which intimate the pre-existence of our Lord. In these, there will always be found, if I mistake not, a clear allusion to the Father;

whence the pre-existence ascribed to our Lord, may justly be considered as derived from the circumstance of his union with the Father. As a first instance, we may take the beginning of St. John's Gospel, chap. i. 1—15, "In the beginning was the Word," &c. I am aware, indeed, that this passage is usually thought to relate to our Lord as distinct from the Father, and to be a description of our Lord as the second person of the Godhead ; but I apprehend that when the passage is fully considered, it will be found that such is not the case. The error of the common interpretation seems to me to arise from supposing that the term "The Word," or "The Word of God," is used here as solely the proper name of our Lord. Now, it is clear that, in its primary signification, it means the articulate expression of the will of God ; and that it is frequently so used in the Old Testament, as when the word of the Lord is said to come to one of the prophets. By which would appear to be meant, either that God made known his will to them by articulate sounds, or else, that what they delivered to mankind was

to be regarded as a verbal communication from God to man; just as men usually make known their minds to each other by means of articulate sounds. This communication to the prophets was only partial, and limited to special occasions. In the case of our Lord, the communication was of a different kind; not occasional by articulate sounds, but entire and constant; and this in consequence of his union to Divinity. Hence, every word that came from him was an expression of the Divine Will; and, therefore, he was properly the incarnate word of God, or the articulate expression of the will of God, inclosed in a human form. But, though, from this circumstance, "The Word," or "The Word of God," is the proper title of our Lord, yet there is no reason why the expression should not be used also in its original sense, as above given. An attention to this circumstance, I think, will enable us to give a satisfactory explanation of the passage in question. The first five verses stand thus in our translation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life ; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." Now, it would appear from this translation, as if the expression "The Word," denoted, in this place, our Lord. That seems clearly to have been the opinion of the translators, from their manner of rendering the passage ; and, indeed, I think that their translation has been in some measure influenced by it. But I apprehend that its meaning is, simply, according to the ordinary use of the term, "word," the articulate expression of the will of God. It seems to me that the whole passage relates to the creation of the world ; and that it is, in truth, a statement taken from the Mosaic account of it, which St. John has introduced as the foundation of his history of the Gospel, for the purpose of tracing the origin of the Incarnate Word to his source. And this he has done very justly, since the main design of his Gospel

is to set forth the person and office of the Redeemer. According to my view then, I should be inclined to render the passage thus; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards* God, and the Word was God. The same (or this Word) was in the beginning towards God. All things were made† by means of it, and without it was not one thing made that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness hath not overpowered‡ it." To see the allusion which there is in this passage to the natural creation,

* This is the primary and natural rendering of the original preposition. But, even if it be translated, as in our version, "with," it would hardly support the common opinion, that the Word is a second person in the essence of the Godhead, and, as such, equal to the Father. Because the phrase, "The Word was with God, would imply an inferiority in the Word to the Father; just as, when, in ordinary language, we speak of one person's being or residing with another, it implies an inferiority in him to that other, from his connexion with whom he derives his distinction.

† I follow here our translation; but if it be objected to, as it is by some, the word "existed," to which no objection could be made, would equally express my notion of the meaning.

‡ Compare John xii. 35.

we have only to turn to the first chapter of Genesis. There we find the formation of each thing declared by this phrase, "God said;" which answers to the Evangelist's statement, that, "In the beginning was the Word. All things were made by it." But we may observe, that as this phrase evidently alludes to the human method of communicating the thoughts, and as what is here related, occurred before the existence of any human creature, we may presume that this style of expression was used by the historian, prospectively, to signify the future intended revelation of the will of God by articulate sounds, and, more especially, by the Incarnate Word. The expressions, "In it was life, and the life was the light of men," clearly refer to the Mosaic statement, that "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep;" and that the first exhibition of life was by the production of light, and that this was done through the verbal declaration of the will of God, as we read, "And God said, let there be light, and there was light." The meaning, then, of the expressions, "In it was life, and the life

was the light of men," is, that in the Word of God was the source of natural life, and that the source of natural life was the natural light which men enjoy. It is added, "And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness hath not overpowered it." By which is meant, that the natural light which at first shone by the word of God, still shines in opposition to the natural darkness of things, and that the darkness has not prevailed against it. This would seem to be the general purport of the passage, taken in a literal sense and in its immediate allusion to the Mosaic history of the Creation. It may be thus explained more at large; "In the beginning of the Creation was the Word, or articulate expression of the will of God, and the word was employed in reference to God, and the word, having this reference, and being thus the medium by which the will of God was made known, was virtually God.* This word, or articulate expression of the will of God, was in the beginning employed in

* In the original, the term "God," is without the article, whereby would seem to be signified, rather, that "the Word," was in some sense God, than essentially so.

reference to God. In this reference, all things were made by means of it, and without it not one thing was made that was made. In it was the source of natural life, and the source of natural life was the natural light of men. And the natural light, from that time, habitually shines in a state of darkness, and the darkness has not permanently overpowered it."

——But as there is a close analogy subsisting between things natural and things spiritual, and which analogy would seem to have been established, expressly, that the former might be a medium for explaining the latter, it will be useful, in order to understand the full meaning of this passage, to consider it spiritually. This will enable us to see the force of particular expressions, which could not be so well done, when the passage was regarded, only, in its allusion to the natural creation. In this view of the matter, then, we are to understand from St. John's saying, "In the beginning was the Word," that he designs to intimate that the Incarnate Word, whose personal history he was about to relate, existed,

originally, at the Creation, though under somewhat different circumstances ; viz. as, simply, the articulate expression of the will of God. He goes on, “ And the Word was towards God ;” that is, that the Word in its first exercise of calling into existence the natural creation, had respect to God ; meaning, that creation was formed for the purpose of promoting the glory of God. He continues, “ And the Word was God :” that is, being the sole medium by which the will of God was known, it was virtually God. He adds, “ The same (or this Word) was in the beginning towards God.” This apparent repetition of what he had said before, I apprehend is done for the purpose of connecting the Word of which he had before spoken, in allusion to the Mosaic account of the creation as the articulate expression of the will of God, with the Word in its incarnate state, the subject of his intended history, and to whom he seems now to allude. This he might very well be understood to do by his readers, who, believing, as they did, that the Incarnate Word was towards God or had respect

to him, would thus be led to perceive the sameness of the Incarnate Word, and of the articulate expression of the will of God which existed at the beginning of Creation. And the sentence might be more fully rendered thus, "This Word was in the beginning, as it now clearly is, towards God, or employed in reference to God." A similar twofold statement respecting the Word occurs in the next verse, where it is spoken of as the instrument of Creation; and, as I think, for a similar purpose. We read, "All things were made by means of it, and without it was not one thing made that was made." The first member of this sentence clearly refers to the natural Creation. And as the second appears to point to something created in addition, we may presume that it is designed to lead our thoughts to the spiritual creation of the man Jesus, styled, "the last Adam," and in whom the Word became incarnate; but, who, as far as he was produced of the Virgin, was, as I have before observed,* merely the natural creature of God's will as

* Page 71.

expressed by the prophet Isaiah. The Evangelist continues, "In it was life, and the life was the light of man. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness hath not overpowered it." The expressions, here, of life, and light, and darkness, which, in the literal acceptation, relate to natural life, and the natural light and darkness, may, according to the Scriptural use of figurative language (and which must, at the date of this Gospel, have been well known to Christians), be fitly applied, respectively, to eternal life, to revelation, and to ignorance of Divine truth. And the sense then of the passage will be, "In the Word of God was the source of eternal life, and the source of eternal life was the revealed knowledge of the will of God operating on the mind as the natural light does on the eyes of men. And as the natural light which first shone by means of the articulate expression of the will of God, still shines, and the natural darkness of things has not overpowered it, so the revealed knowledge of the will of God emanating from the Incarnate Word, still operates on human

ignorance of Divine truth, and human ignorance has not overpowered it.”—— This would appear to be the full sense of these five verses, as figuratively applied to the incarnate condition in which the Word afterward existed ; but, in their literal meaning, they describe the Word as it was at the beginning of the natural creation. St. John, having thus cleared the way by this account of the Word of God in its original state, proceeds, in ver. 14. to give an account of its incarnation. But, to see the connexion, we must observe, that the intermediate verses, from the fifth, are parenthetical. They contain a general statement respecting John the Baptist as a witness to our Lord, and a description of our Lord as the source of the true or spiritual revelation of the will of God ; by which revelation is meant the gospel, as distinguished from the typical revelation of it made in the Mosaical dispensation, of which the gospel is the substance. This statement is most conveniently introduced here to suit the order of the narrative. It is, as it were, a note respecting the nature

of John's testimony and the character of our Lord's doctrine, preparatory to the historical account which follows of John's testimony,* and of the superiority of the revelations made by our Lord, as compared with the Mosaic.† These intermediate verses, then, should be thus explained ; 6. *There was a man sent from* (more strictly, with the concurring design of) *God, whose name was John.* 7. *The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*—As it is clear that John's office could not have been to bear witness to the natural light, that term must be understood here, as relating to Divine revelation ; since there is evidently an allusion to a person, or rather, to our Lord as its source, who is on that account frequently termed in Scripture “ the Light.” And the meaning of these two verses, then, is, that there was a man sent with a commission from God, whose name was John. The same came, not as a principal, but as a witness, in order to bear witness to the source of the revelation which was to be

* Ver. 15.

† Ver. 16—18.

made of the Divine will, to the intent that all men might, through John's testimony, believe on the person who was the source of the Divine revelation.—8. *He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*—He was not himself the source of the Divine revelation, but was sent to bear witness of the person who was its source.—9. *That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* (or, better rendered, which coming into the world lighteth every man).—This person was the source of the true revelation of the Divine will, who, coming into the world, is the proper means to every man of a knowledge of the Divine revelation.—10. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*—After the declaration, that this person is, by coming into the world, the proper medium for the knowledge of Divine revelation, there rightly follows the statement of his having so come, *He was in the world.* It is said, also, that *the world was made by him.* Wherein, the allusion is to his original condition of being the articulate expression of

the Divine will; and, though this may seem an anticipation of the title of the Word, which is not applied to him till ver. 14. yet it is not unsuitable in this paragraph, considered as a parenthetical note. And it is added, that *the world knew him not*; that is, as the source of Divine revelation.—11. *He came unto his own* (that is, his own country, Judea, called *his own*, from its having been favoured with a Divine revelation), *and his own* (countrymen, the Jews, collectively, and, as such, under Divine influence) *received him not* (as the source of true Divine revelation). 12. *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become (the) sons of God* (that is, voluntarily to become subject to Divine influence on their minds), *even to them that believe on his name*: (that is, have a just belief and dependence on the character which he claimed to himself). 13. *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (that is, not by the ordinary process of generation, nor by any carnal means, nor yet by human but by Divine means).—The purport of

this verse seems to be, to explain the expressions, in the former one, of *sons of God, and believers on the name of Christ*; and to intimate, that the phrase, *sons of God*, is to be understood spiritually, as signifying persons who have experienced a change of mind, described under the figure of a new birth, wrought in them not by any natural means, but by the influencing power of God; and that Christian believers are persons of that kind.—After this parenthetical explanation of the Baptist's testimony, and of the true character and office of our Lord, the historian, resuming his narrative, proceeds to relate the incarnation of the Word; and so adds, —14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt* (literally, existed as in a tent) *among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.*—The meaning of which verse, exclusively of the parenthesis, is, that the Word or articulate expression of the will of God, existed in the world, covered with human flesh, as a person in a tent, being, when in that state, in

contradistinction to the revelation of the Divine will made in the strict commands and typical declarations of the Jewish Law, full of grace and truth, altogether conciliatory and explicit: and the sense of what is said in the parenthesis is, that while the Word was in the above incarnate condition, we (mankind) were enabled to behold him, as far as our faculties will admit, in that glorious condition of the human nature, *and we beheld his glory*; but, in order to explain that this glorious condition was not of a bodily kind but a spiritual, it is added, *the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father*; that is, according to the explanation which I have before given of the phrase, *only-begotten Son of God*, the glorious condition of being, singly, and exclusively of all other persons, wholly under Divine influence. Now, it must be manifest from the above explanation, that this passage does not require for its interpretation, that it should be applied to our Lord distinctly from the Father. The pre-existence of our Lord, which is intimated in it, is fully made out by the consideration

of his intimate union with the Father, whereby he became his Incarnate Word, and which existed from the beginning. It is under this point of view, indeed, that strictly speaking, the Divine nature, as resident in our Lord, is to be considered ; and I apprehend, that it is always with allusion to this circumstance of our Lord's being the Incarnate Word of God, that Divinity is ascribed to him in the Scriptures.

The detailed examination which we have made of this passage, has opened a way for the true interpretation of all other texts, which intimate the pre-existence of our Lord with a similar allusion to his union with the Father ; of which we may consider one or two instances. Of this kind is that of John viii. 58, " Before Abraham was I am."* The phrase of " I am," being expres-

* Our translators, from that spirit of impartiality which distinguishes their translation throughout, have forbore, in all the other instances in which the original words answering to the phrase, " I am," occur, to render them otherwise than by supplying something to them, as a supposed ellipsis. In the present case, it is impossible to suppose any ellipsis. For, as to the rendering, proposed by some, that the pronoun, " he," or " the Messiah," is to be supplied, it is merely a gratuitous supposition which has nothing in the context to support it ;

sive of the eternal existence of God, shews that there is, here, an allusion to the Father; and, as our Lord, through his union with the Father, partook of the Divine nature, it was certainly quite right to speak of himself under the description of eternal existence, which is appropriate to the Father. Another text of the same kind is that of John xvii. 5. "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory (or glorify me with the glory with respect to thine own self) which I had with thee, (or, with respect to thee) before the world was." In order to see the true meaning of

and therefore, if it were allowable in this case, to suppose an ellipsis, we should be at liberty to supply any thing we pleased. We cannot but applaud the motives which have influenced our translators thus to confine themselves in their version. But I think that it is more than they were called upon to do; and that in fact, it would have given the sense more correctly, if they had, in all the cases in which this phrase occurs in the original by itself, translated it, as here, without supposing an ellipsis. For though it is true, that the context in those cases, allows of the supposition of an ellipsis, yet if the places are duly considered, I think that it will be found to be more than probable, that it was intended, at least, tacitly to intimate by it a claim on the part of our Lord to eternal existence; and so to establish his Divinity and oneness with the Father. This, I think, is particularly the case of John xviii. 5, 6.

these expressions, it should be noticed that they are part of the audible prayer uttered by our Lord, at the conclusion of his solemn discourse with his Apostles. And this prayer, like that which was delivered at the raising of Lazarus, should be considered as intended for the benefit of those who stood by (see John xi. 41, 42). In that case, we are told that the design was to establish, generally, a belief in our Lord's Divine mission. In this, the main intention seems to be, to lead the Apostles to reflect on our Lord as the Incarnate Word of God. But to have a right view of this intention, we should keep in mind, that the Word of God, had, previously to its incarnation in the person of our Lord, always appeared in its appropriate and supernatural character; but that in the days of its humiliation in the person of our Lord, it was, in consequence of its being veiled under human infirmity, much obscured. Hence, we may infer that it is to that glory which had always before accompanied the delivery of the Divine Word, that our Lord here alludes. It is true that our Lord describes it as the glory which he had with the Fa-

ther before the world was, which may seem to imply his own personal pre-existence. But it should be considered, that as our Lord became, by the Divine union, a permanent exhibition of the Word of God, it was quite proper that our Lord, speaking in reference to that part of his constitution, should identify himself with the Divine Word in its pre-existent state before the creation of the world, though his Divine union took place subsequently. The purport of the passage is to intimate that the Word of God, which had been only partially received by the preaching of Christ, in consequence of the obscurity under which it appeared, should, through the preaching of the Apostles, meet with a glorious reception, and be as effectual as it was at the creation of the world. This interpretation will be confirmed by a reference to the whole of the prayer; of which it will here be sufficient to mark the principal divisions. To the end of v. 4, is a statement of our Lord's perfect righteousness, in making known the will of God to the extent to which he had been appointed to do it, and which knowledge, thus im-

parted, was to be the foundation of the future perfect manifestation of the will of God, which was gradually to take place after his death and ascension ; whereby the glory of the Divine Word would be openly established, in its original splendour and perfection. The purport of v. 5, is a prayer that this may take place. In v. 6—19, inclusively, our Lord would seem to state, that he had by his preaching made known, specially to his Apostles, the Divine Word, which they had received as such ; and, to pray that, as they thus possessed it in a state of perfect truth, as delivered by Christ from God, so they might be enabled to impart it, in the same state, as from Christ to mankind at large. And in v. 20—26, he would seem to pray, that the union between Christians, which would be established by the preaching of the Apostles, and be founded on their relationship with each other and with him, and, through him with God, might be as perfect as the union between Christ and God.

These three texts are the principal ones relating to the pre-existence of our Lord, with allusion to his Divine union ; and it

is unnecessary to pursue the inquiry into the others of the same kind, because they are all to be explained, in like manner, by the consideration of this union, whereby our Lord became the Incarnate Word of God. But I may observe, in particular, that this consideration will fully explain any text, which implies the pre-existence of our Lord by ascribing to him Creation.

There is, however, one text (Philip. ii. 6. 8.) which is supposed to intimate the pre-existence of our Lord, which calls for a particular notice; because if it contains, as supposed, an intimation of the pre-existence of our Lord, this pre-existence must be such as cannot be explained by the circumstance of the Divine union of Christ with the Father. But I am of opinion that it has no allusion whatever to any pre-existence of our Lord, but that it relates solely to his condition as a human being; not, indeed, as a mere man, but as a man in intimate union with God so as to be one with him; and, which, indeed, is the only light in which our Lord ought ever to be considered. The practice of reasoning on the Divine and human natures in our Lord

as distinct, which has arisen out of the ordinary mode of explaining the doctrine of the Trinity, seems to be altogether improper, inasmuch as it has a tendency to prevent our having a just conception of our Lord by making us, at least, for the time, think of him as a mere man; whereas, in strictness, we can form no other just notion of our Lord than the compound one of a union of the Divine and human natures in one person. The passage is thus given in our translation, "Who (Christ Jesus), being in the form (external appearance), of God, thought it not robbery (rather, did not covet) to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The opinion, that this text implies the pre-existence of Christ, is founded, entirely, on the supposition that the phrase of, "being in the form of God," relates to the essential nature of the Deity. Now, there

is nothing in these terms, or in the connexion, either before or after, to lead to this supposition. On the contrary, it will be found, on due reflection, that, both the proper meaning of the terms and the evident purport of the context, fully confirm the opinion, that the whole passage relates only to our Lord's condition as a man in union with Divinity. The original word translated "form," signifies external appearance. And as our Lord, by his Divine union, and the consequent effectual operation of his word, was to us, as to external appearance considered intellectually and according to our views, a perfect representation of God, the phrase of, "being in the form of God," is justly applied to him. He was thereby truly God to us, though he was not so in his original essence and independently of his Divine union. It is in a similar way that the word "form" is afterward used (v. 7.) with regard to the human condition of life which our Lord occupied; as when he is said to have taken "the form of a servant." He was truly, as to external appearance considered intellectually and

according to our views, a servant, both to God and man; though not necessarily so by his original constitution as a human being in perfect union with Divinity. That the connexion agrees with this explanation of the phrase of, “being in the form of God,” will appear on examination. But preparatory to its consideration, it may be useful to point out the exact meaning of the text in question; for, though its general purport is sufficiently given in our translation, I think it might be more accurately interpreted as thus: *Who being in an external appearance of God*,—This he was, as before observed, from the effectual operation of his word—*did not covet to be (in external appearance) in all respects equal to God*;*—Though Christ was really equal to God, inasmuch as he could do all things by his word only, yet, as he did this, pro-

* *In all respects equal to God.* I am inclined to explain the original phrase, *εἶναι ὡς Θεῷ*, by considering *ὡς* as a neuter plural with *πάντα* understood. And, then, it might be literally rendered, “to be in a relation to God according to all the circumstances of equality.” Bishop Sherlock translates the place, “Was not fond of, or tenacious of appearing as God,” vol. ii. Discourse 50.

fessedly, always, in subservience to the Father, as one sent by him, he was, as to external appearance, so far not in all respects equal to God. And, hence, the meaning is, that Christ did not covet this display of an independent exercise of spiritual power, so as to appear in all respects equal to God—but *emptied himself* (of the independent exercise of spiritual power) *having* (in conformity with this) *taken upon himself an external appearance of a servant, having* (for that purpose) *been made in the likeness of men. And being found in the condition of a man, he* (in that condition), *humbled himself* (to the lowest degradation), *having become obedient* (to all the circumstances of his condition, and therein) *to* (the suffering of) *death, even the death of the cross.*—Now, it must be clear from this exposition of the passage, that it may very fitly be applied to the conduct of our Lord as a human being in union with Divinity. And to that also, it will be found that the context alludes. The Apostle's design in the preceding verses, plainly is, to exhort the Philippians to the practice of humility and

mutual regard ; and, in furtherance of this, he here adduces the example of Christ. Now, it is natural to suppose, that, in selecting an instance for this purpose, he would adduce as the most pertinent example, the conduct of Christ as a man ; because, certainly, the nearer the relation in which he stood to the Philippians, the stronger would be the influence of his example upon them. If the case be considered as that of a Divine Being laying aside his Divinity and becoming man for the purpose of promoting human happiness, it would, assuredly, be a high instance of voluntary humiliation and self-devotion for the benefit of others ; but as the action of one of a different nature from our own, it would of course be less interesting to us than a similar one done by a person in our own nature. Its efficacy also as a model would be much lessened, since, it could not be strictly imitated. But, if the case be considered as that of a man in intimate union with Divinity, voluntarily relinquishing the independent exercise of Divine power, and submitting entirely to the Di-

vine Will, the example which it exhibits of humility and obedience, is one which comes immediately home to our understandings and feelings, and is altogether adapted to our imitation. And, now, as to the subsequent part of the connexion, I think that it clearly indicates this view of the case. For the purport of the three verses immediately following is, without question, to declare the exaltation of Christ to permanent worship, but still subordinately to the glory of God. *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.* Upon which declaration I will only remark, that, if this exaltation of the man Jesus Christ to permanent worship with the Father, does not directly oppose the supposition of a Son existing in the Divine Essence, it seems, at least, to make it unnecessary. And let it always be kept in mind, that this notion is merely

a supposition, formed from a variety of particulars and by distant inferences.

We may now proceed to consider the other title ascribed to our Lord, that of, "The Son of Man." Its purport is, as before noticed, to signify the Divine nature made in a certain sense human in the person of Christ. But, as was before observed of the corresponding title of, "The Son of God," to make out its meaning accurately, it will be necessary to consider it spiritually. Now, as according to what has been before shewn, the phrase, "Son of God," signifies the being under Divine influence, so also, does this phrase of, "Son of Man;" but it expresses, at the same time, that this influence is evinced in reference to man. The two phrases, indeed, would be better rendered thus; Son in respect of God, and Son in respect of man. But to see this a particular inquiry will be necessary.

It has been remarked as a peculiarity of this appellation, that "it is in all the Evangelists found under the peculiar circumstance of being applied by Christ to himself, but of never being used of him, or

towards him, by any other person. It occurs seventeen times in Matthew's Gospel, twelve times in Mark's, twenty-one times in Luke's, and eleven times in John's, and always with this restriction."* Now, from this circumstance, as far as it concerned our Lord's disciples, we may infer, that they understood the phrase in its obvious sense of expressing merely a human being, and therefore, avoided the use of it with regard to our Lord, as too familiar and derogatory to the general but indistinct notion which they had of the superiority of his character. At the same time, the constant use of it by our Lord himself, seems to imply that he used it in a different sense from what it was supposed to convey; and the reluctance of the disciples to employ it, can be accounted for, only by their inaptitude to interpret the figurative language of Christianity in a spiritual sense. In order, therefore, to ascertain its precise meaning, we must understand it, as in the case of the corresponding phrase of "Son of God," in reference to the

* Paley's Evidences, Part ii. c. iv. s. 3.

mind. With regard to that phrase, it has been shewn, that when so interpreted, it signifies, in a general sense, Divine influence upon the mind. But it should be observed, that in strictness, the term, "Son," alone, used in reference to the mind, is significative of its being under the influence of another. And hence, when the term, Son, is so applied to Christ, it must signify his being under Divine influence; since, that is the only influence which he could be supposed to be under. Indeed, as to the case of this title of, "Son of Man," it must be so understood; for otherwise, the title cannot be applied to our Lord in any appropriate spiritual meaning. I am, therefore, inclined to think that these two appellations of our Lord, would be more fully and accurately explained by being respectively rendered, "Son in respect of God," and "Son in respect of Man." And, hence, the first of these titles, inasmuch as it expresses Christ's being under Divine influence in respect of God, would signify the perfect righteousness of his character; and the second, inasmuch as it expresses Christ's

being under Divine influence in respect of Man, would signify his exercise of the Divine attributes and miraculous power towards mankind. This explanation of this latter title, will be confirmed by considering the manner in which it is employed in Scripture; which, if I mistake not, will be found to be always conformably to this notion. Of this it will be sufficient to produce a few marked instances. In Matt. ix. 2—7. we read, “And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son,* be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This *man* blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man [*meaning, as before explained, Christ*

* This title I apprehend is used in reference to their faith; and so it confirms the spiritual meaning I have before given to the word.

exercising the Divine attributes and miraculous power towards mankind] hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house." Again, at Matt. xii. 8. "For the Son of Man is Lord even of (rather in respect of) the Sabbath-day"—that is, as I believe it should be understood, Christ exercising the Divine attributes, is as much an object for adoration as the Creator; and, therefore has the same special claim to the attention of his disciples on the Sabbath-day as is appointed by the fourth commandment to be paid to God on that day. This interpretation would be fully confirmed by a reference to the context. But it is unnecessary to go so far into the particular subject, on this occasion, as it is quite clear, from what our Lord says just before in v. 6, that he intended to claim for himself a title to Divinity; "But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple." Again, the title is applied to Christ as executing Divine judgment, Matt. xiii. 41.

“The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,” &c. These instances may suffice to shew the proper meaning of this phrase. But it will be right to observe, that though it was thus used by our Lord himself, it was not always understood in this its appropriate sense by his hearers. An instance of this occurs in Matt. xvi. 13, 14. We read, “When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” Now, it is clear from this answer of the disciples, that they supposed, that, when our Lord described himself as the Son of Man, he intended to signify by that phrase, merely, a human being. But this circumstance would not interfere at all with our Lord’s use of it in its appropriate sense; for, as I have elsewhere remarked; “it was customary with our Lord to use words in a larger and a

more spiritual sense than was ascribed to them by the persons with whom he conversed. In which cases he sometimes explains his meaning openly, as in that of "making free," in John viii. 31—34, and that of "meat" in John iv. 31—34; but, at other times, more obscurely, leaving it to be made out by reflection, as in that of the word "neighbour," which he explains by a parable, see Luke x. 25—37. This mode of teaching was altogether suitable to his character as a superior and independent legislator. Nor could any inconvenience arise from it; as, either, the sense which our Lord intended to convey was sufficiently pointed out in the explanation, or, else, the limited and inferior meaning in which it was taken by the hearers, was included in the larger and higher one designed by our Lord.* In this instance, the signification of, "a human being," in which light the disciples viewed the phrase, is included in its spiritual meaning of, "Christ exercising, through the Divine union, miraculous power towards man-

* Paraphrase 1 Ep. Cor. p. 202.

kind," since this was founded on his partaking of the human nature; which, in external bodily appearance, and as the fruit of Mary's womb, he did.

Having by this minute inquiry made out the true meaning of these two titles of the Messiah, I apprehend that there can be no difficulty in determining the sense of those passages of Scripture, which describe God, under the title of "Son." For, as, in truth, it can never be applied to Him but through Christ, it must always be in one or the other of the two senses, in which these titles are used of our Lord. And, I think, then, that the natural result is, that the only just notion which we can form of God as a Son, is, as far as he is exhibited to us as such in the person of our Lord, as a man intimately united to the Deity. This union, it should always be remembered, is founded on an intercourse, which, though it differed not in kind from that which subsisted between God and the prophets, is, in extent, and duration, altogether different; since the Divine intercourse with the prophets was only partial and occasional, and this

is both entire and permanent; so that, to use the language of Bishop Horsley, though, for a somewhat different view of the subject, “the very existence of the man Jesus consisted, and ever will consist, in this union.”* This distinction and superiority in Christ, as a Son, above the prophets, is pointed out by St. Paul in the beginning of his Epistle to the Hebrews. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* (rather, a) Son.” It should be observed, that the word “his,” as its italic form denotes, has nothing answering to it in the original. And this indefinite mode of expression would seem to be preferable; as, thereby, the appropriate distinction between Christ and the prophets, being regarded as one not of persons but of office, is more strongly marked. The purport of this part of these two verses, is to declare, that the communications from God which were made by the prophets and those which

* Serm. xxxiv.

were made by Christ, were, alike, exhibitions of the Divine Word, or articulate expressions of the will of God. After this, the Apostle goes on to shew the superiority of Christ, as a Son. But, in doing this, he states nothing but what is most fitly to be understood of Christ, as a human being in perfect union with Divinity. He adds, “whom he hath appointed heir of all things (*that is, of all the future spiritual blessings of the Christian scheme*), by whom (*or, by means of whom*) also he made the worlds;” (*rather according to the primary meaning of the original expression, the several temporary dispensations from God to man: that is, Christ was the original principle in the formation of these dispensations.*)* The

* I have before noticed (p. 124) that Creation may not improperly be ascribed to Christ, since he was the Incarnate Word of God. But I apprehend, that this text, as well as some others in which it is commonly supposed that the creation of the material world is ascribed to Christ, will be found, on careful examination, to relate, not to that matter, but to the circumstance that Christ as the Incarnate Word of God, was the essential principle, as well as the medium of God’s moral dispensations to his creatures, more especially, of the

Apostle then proceeds to speak of him as he appeared on earth, adding, “Who being the brightness of his glory, (rather, *an effulgence from his glory, not the perfect exhibition of it, according to what is implied in Christ’s prayer to his heavenly Father, John xvii. 5.*) and the express image of his person, (or *personal qualities; which Christ was, by exercising spiritual miraculous power according to his own free-will*) and upholding all things by the word of his power, (or powerful word—*by all things, must here be meant, primarily, all things relating to the Christian scheme, which is the matter in question, but, therein all other things may be said to be included, since all things were originally designed in subservience to Christianity*) when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made (*that is, being then made or having become*) so much better than the angels, (*rather the messengers, that is, the prophets before mentioned, as persons by whom*

Christian; and which, therefore, might justly be said to have been made by means of him, since, without him they could not have existed. Of this kind are Col. i. 16. Heb. xi. 3, &c.

God spake, but who were not, as Christ, in union with God) as he hath by inheritance obtained (or, rather, obtained as a fixed lot) a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels (rather, messengers, as appears by what follows; for it is only with the declarations of God to men, that we are, strictly speaking, concerned or even acquainted) said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? (This, as I have before shewn, relates to the resurrection of our Lord.) And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? (Though men are sometimes described, in Scripture, as sons of God, there is no instance of any individual's being addressed as such by God: this is probably founded on the distinction, before noticed, between an adopted and a begotten Son, and so the phrase, "Sons of God," would seem to relate to the Christian dispensation in which men are adopted as sons, through Christ.) And, again, when he bringeth in (rather, when he again bringeth in; that is, at our Lord's resurrection) the first-begotten into the world,*

* P. 90.

he saith, And let all the angels (*messengers*) of God worship him. And of the angels (*that is, concerning messengers*) he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire (*rather, who maketh winds his messengers, and a flame of fire his ministers: by which it appears that any thing employed as an instrument for executing God's will, may be styled a messenger or servant of God*). But unto the Son, he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: (*This is addressed to Christ in allusion to the Divine part of his constitution. as the Incarnate Word of God.*) They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not

fail. But to which of the angels (*messengers*) said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they (*the messengers*) not all (*merely*) ministering spirits, sent forth (*on special occasions*) to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

We may now consider, as we proposed to do thirdly, those passages of Scripture in which God is presented to us by the terms, "The Holy Spirit." And, here, we shall have two things to do; First, to ascertain in what sense those expressions are to be understood as applied to God; and then, to shew how we are to infer from them a distinct personality. Now, in fixing the true meaning of these expressions, it will be requisite to observe a caution, the reverse of that which was necessary on the former topic. For, whereas, in forming a notion of the sense in which the term, "Son," is to be applied to God, the difficulty was to do it in its appropriate spiritual acceptation; whence it was necessary to avoid the danger of resting in the bodily notions which the word primarily conveys, and so, of mistak-

ing that part of the doctrine : in the present case, on the contrary, it is quite clear that the words are to be taken in a spiritual sense. But, then, as our knowledge of spiritual things is very limited, and as it is not the design of the Scriptures to teach by abstract notions, our care should be to interpret the expressions in the most obvious and popular sense that the subject will admit of. Hence, by the term, “spirit,” we should understand, “the mind,” as it exists in men ; concerning which, as the source of thought and reasoning, every one is doubtless able to form some general notion for himself. And for this sense of the word, we have the authority of St. Paul ; for it is to be observed, that he describes the Spirit of God as bearing a similar relation in the Godhead to that which the intellectual faculty does in man. In 1 Ep. Cor. ii. 11. he says, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” And, therefore, the phrase, “The Spirit of God,” may properly be interpreted, the mind of

God. By which we cannot pretend to do more than to apply to God, the circumstances of the spiritual part of our constitution, for the purpose of illustration, and with a view to our improvement in religious knowledge ; just as, for similar reasons, we apply to him the parts and properties of our bodily constitution : as when we speak of God as having eyes and ears, a mouth, and hands, and as seeing, hearing, talking, and preserving by the strength of his arm. And, as the word, “ holy,” signifies set apart for a particular purpose, and, in Scriptural language, signifies, more particularly, consecrated to the use and glory of God ; hence, the phrase, “ the Holy Spirit of God,” must be taken to mean the mind of God as exercised for the promotion of his glory ; and, so, distinguished from the mind of man, which, naturally, is inclined to its own gratification. Now, as the mind of God may thus be considered as a thing which may in a greater or less degree be imparted to mankind ; hence, the Holy Spirit is spoken of, in Scripture, as a gift. Thus in Luke xi. 13. “ If ye then, being evil, know how

to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Again, in John iii. 34. "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure *unto him*" (our Lord). And in Acts x. 45. it is distinctly spoken of as a gift, "because that on the Gentiles also, was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." It is next to be observed, that, as the mind is the superior part in the constitution of man, that word may be used, in a general sense, to signify the man himself. The usual term, indeed, for this is "soul;" but the meaning is nevertheless the same, because the soul, as far as we can conceive of it, is, properly, the mind considered apart from the body: that is, in its purest state. In this way the phrase, "The Holy Spirit," may be used personally to signify God; and in that application, conveys to us a sufficient notion of him as an intellectual being. But to see this application of the phrase in its full and appropriate sense, we should consider, further, that the natural property of mind is, that one mind is able to influence other minds. This is done,

in the case of men, through the communication which is made of ideas by speech and reasoning. But by a pure intelligence, this is effected by means of a secret communication of thoughts. Hence, the Holy Spirit or God influences our minds by secretly infusing into them a particular train of ideas: and this, either in an extraordinary manner, independently of any exertion on our own parts; or, else, in an ordinary way, through our own co-operation, that is, by our voluntarily employing our thoughts about God and the things relating to him. Whence we may infer, that when God is presented to us under the designation of the Holy Spirit, and as such acting upon us, he is to be regarded as a pure intelligence influencing our minds in reference to himself and the things pertaining to him. It is in this twofold sense, then, that the phrase, "The Holy Spirit," or, "The Spirit," is to be understood; either as denoting the mind of God imparted, in a greater or less degree, as a gift to mankind; or as God himself acting upon the human mind: and it is from the

context that we must, in each case, make out in which of the senses the phrase is to be taken.

But we have now to shew how we are to infer from these expressions a distinct personality. I apprehend that it is in this way. In the conversation which our Lord held with his Apostles, on the night in which he was betrayed, he said to them, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever," John xiv. 16. And in v. 26. he adds, "The Comforter, *which** is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And it appears that this coming of the Comforter depended entirely on our Lord's ascension. For we find that, in a subse-

* It may be useful to notice, for the sake of those who are unacquainted with the original, that the word, "which," having, as appears from its Italic character, no word answering to it in the Greek, is inserted conformably to the gender of the Greek word for "Spirit," but that a person is alluded to, appears from the pronouns, "whom" and "he," in the latter part of the sentence.

quent part of the same conversation, our Lord adds, "It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you ;" xvi. 7. Now it must be evident from the mere recital of these passages, that, by the expressions, "The Holy Ghost," a person is here implied. But we have before seen, that when the phrase is so used, it designates God. As, however, we could not in that sense give any proper meaning to the circumstance, that the Holy Ghost was to be sent by the Father and by Christ, we must infer that by the Holy Ghost is here signified a distinct person. And as the title itself of Holy Ghost or Spirit implies, that the person, in this case, is of the same substance as God, the natural conclusion is, that by the Holy Ghost whom the Father and Christ would send, was intended to be signified a distinct Spiritual Being the same as God. Of the possibility of the establishment of such separate existence of the Deity we cannot doubt, when we consider the perfect communi-

cation, which, as we have already shewn, God made of himself to a human being in the person of Christ. Of the mode in which the Holy Ghost or the mind of God, was thus established in a state of distinct existence, we can hardly expect, with our limited knowledge of spiritual things, to have any accurate conception : but, it is not necessary that we should. It will be sufficient for us to form an indefinite notion of it, under the same general expression which is applied to the existence of the Holy Spirit in the ordinary view of the doctrine of the Trinity ; as when we speak of Him as proceeding from the Father and the Son. But it may be observed, that, according to this view, the procession of the Holy Ghost is necessarily from both the Father and the Son. This follows from the circumstance of the Divine union, and is confirmed by the declarations in the above texts, that the Holy Ghost is sent by both the Father and the Son. We may further observe, that this distinct personal existence of the Holy Spirit is to be reckoned from the day of Pentecost subse-

quent to our Lord's ascension; since the promise which our Lord gave of the coming of the Holy Ghost, doubtless referred to the exhibition which was made of his power, on that occasion.* But, then, we are not to limit his existence to that time. Being, really, the mind of God, he is properly eternal, though his distinct personal existence takes date from that period. It is on the same principle, that, as before shewn, we decide on the Eternal existence of our Lord from the circumstance of his being virtually the Word of God, though his personal existence took place at the period of the Incarnation. It will confirm this view of the subject, to consider, that it is only in the texts which relate to matters subsequent to our Lord's ascension, that the Holy Ghost is spoken of in terms which necessarily imply his separate existence. In texts relating to matters previous to the Ascension, the phrase of, "The Holy Ghost," may be taken to signify, either the mind of God, or, more absolutely, God himself: but in those which refer to mat-

* Acts i. 4.

ters since, it cannot be always so understood ; as when it is said, “ the Father shall give you another Comforter ;”^{*} and again, when Christ speaks of “ the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name ;”[†] and also, says, “ I will send him unto you ;”[‡] and again, when our Lord says of the Holy Spirit “ he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.”[§] In these cases, a separate personal existence is necessarily supposed. And, therefore, if it be inquired, what authority there is for this opinion of the separate existence of the Holy Ghost, the answer is, that, as it is clearly implied by the expressions used on the subject by our Lord, it is, consequently, founded on the declaration of the Incarnate Word of God. And we may add, that it is from thence also, that we determine that it took place on the day of Pentecost after our Lord’s ascension,|| on which day he made the first exhibition of his power, by suddenly enabling the apostles to speak a great variety

^{*} John xiv. 16. [†] Ibid. 26. [‡] Ibid. xvi. 7.

[§] Ibid. 13. || Acts i. 4.

of languages. From that day forward, the Church of Christ is to be regarded as being under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit of God in a state of separate personal existence. If it be said, that, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is virtually the same as God, this distinct personality would seem to be unnecessary, it should be considered, that, though indeed, as in reference to God, it might not appear to be required, yet that in its effect on mankind, it has a great advantage which would account for the appointment. The Deity himself, is of so grand and awful a nature as hardly to admit of being approached, even in thought, with the composure and familiarity which are required towards a teacher and guide. And it would seem, therefore, that the establishment of the Holy Spirit, or, of the mind of God, in a state of distinct personal existence, under circumstances of close connexion with mankind, was part of the same Divine condescension which caused the incarnation of the Word of God; and it is observable, that, by our Lord's speaking of the comforter as being

sent in his stead, we are naturally led to think of him as the same familiar and kind instructor that he himself had been. Indeed, in the next verse, our Lord distinctly says, that he himself will come, thereby identifying himself (as in a spiritual sense he might properly do) with the Holy Spirit. And it should be remembered, that this institution of the Holy Spirit could not take place till after our Lord's ascension; for we are told, that "the Holy Ghost was, not yet *given*, because that Jesus was not yet glorified:"* whence we may infer,

John vii. 39. The word "given" has nothing answering to it in the original. The whole verse, I think, might be literally rendered thus; "But this he spake of the Spirit, of whom the believers in him were about to receive (the grant or influence); for as yet there was not a Holy Spirit (that is, distinctly established), because Jesus was not yet glorified." Though I think this is the full meaning of the verse, it is not to be supposed that it was thus fully understood at the time of its delivery. It should be remembered, that, in the original, the phrase of the Holy Spirit is capable of being interpreted, as it is with us, either as a gift or as a person. And, though in the use of it by our Lord in the discourse recorded in John xiv—xvi. there is, as before noticed, an evident allusion to a person (see p. 149.) and which could not but have conveyed to his hearers a notion of personality as to the Holy Spirit; yet, unaccompanied as it was by any ex-

that he is intended to supply the loss of our Lord's visible presence. In truth, this further manifestation of God would seem to have been intended for the purpose of leading us, by a gradual and easy method, to think of Him as a Spiritual Being. In the person of Christ, God was manifest to us in the flesh, whereby, however, his nature was necessarily in some measure veiled; by the institution of the Holy Spirit, God is presented to our minds under circumstances of pure spirituality. This distinct establishment, therefore, of the Holy Spirit of God, is to be regarded as means peculiarly

planation, it could have given them, during our Lord's life, only an indistinct notion on the subject. Probably, the chief notion which the disciples at that time entertained respecting the promise of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter, related to the restoration of the gift of prophecy, which had been the customary exhibition of extraordinary spiritual influence in the Jewish dispensation, and had been suspended for nearly four hundred years. After the apostles were duly enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they doubtless understood the phrase in its appropriate personal sense, and on suitable occasions used it in that way; without however giving any special explanation, but leaving it to Christians to make out the true meaning by their own reflections. These remarks may be particularly applied to Acts ii. 33. and xix. 2.

adapted to the use and advantage of mankind. But to speak strictly, it has been done for the purpose of Christian edification, conformably to our Lord's representation of the office of the Holy Spirit. For he says, "the comforter *which* is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." (John xiv. 26.) The permanency of the institution is declared in v. 16; "he (the Father) shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." And it is altogether suitable that we should have the assurance of the Divine word as delivered by Christ, that the Divine mind is thus specially instituted for the purpose of Christian edification; and so is continually at hand to assist the virtuous and holy endeavours of Christians, and will hereafter be the means of making them perfect. More especially is this beneficial, since God is not the object of our senses. And, therefore, to apply to this particular case the general

expressions of St. John,* since no man hath seen God at any time, it is most useful and encouraging to us that this truth should have been declared by the only-begotten Son, who is (at all times) in the bosom of the Father. To such persons as have accustomed themselves to act under a due submission to the superintending mind of God, this matter will appear sufficiently intelligible, and they will readily and gratefully acknowledge the wisdom and mercy of the arrangement. But, in proportion as we are less accustomed to spiritual meditation and less under this holy influence, the greater will be the difficulty in the way of rightly apprehending the matter. This is intimated by our Lord, in making the promise of the Comforter. For he declares, that to the world or the unregenerate part of mankind, the subject is unintelligible, because the knowledge of it is not attainable by the sight, or by the natural sources of knowledge; but that to the Apostles it

* 1 John i. 18.

was intelligible, as they were already, in some measure, conversant with the mind of God, and would hereafter be intimately so :* whence we may conclude that it would be equally so to all others in proportion as they are in similar circumstances.

This, then, would seem to be the true meaning of the three several designations given to the Deity, of “the Father,” “the

* John xiv. 17. “*Even* the Spirit of truth ; whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him ; for he dwelleth (or remaineth) with you, and shall be in you.” It will be seen that I have given the general sense of the passage, in preference to a quotation of the words ; which I have done, because I am inclined to think, that this verse is intended as an explanatory description of the promised Comforter, as the mind of God ; and thence styled, the spirit or mind of truth, as being conversant with nothing else, and so, distinguished from the natural mind of man, which is conversant with falsehood. This opinion seems to be confirmed by the expressions in the latter part of the verse, “he dwelleth with you.” This could not properly be said of the Comforter who had only just before been promised ; but the Divine mind might, in a general sense, be said to have already dwelt (or remained) with the Apostles as believers. I think that the passage would have been more correctly rendered “the spirit of truth which the world cannot receive, because it seeth it not,” &c.

Son," and "the Holy Spirit." And it appears that they intimate to us the existence of God under three distinct personalities. But as these are in reality the mind of God in three separate states of existence, there will be no difficulty in conceiving of these three persons as subsisting in perfect unity. This is a thing that sometimes takes place, as to particular subjects among men. Of this we have an instance in Acts iv. 32. We read, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." However, the most perfect exhibition of the union of two minds, which can take place in human life, is to be looked for from the marriage institution, according to its original design; as is intimated by the Divine declaration respecting it, "These two shall be one flesh;" or rather, "These two shall be (or be reckoned for) one person.*

* Matt. xix. 5.

The general inference from the whole inquiry is, that God is to be worshipped under the notion of a Trinity of persons of the same substance and of perfect equality. So far the result agrees entirely with the common doctrine on the subject. And, therefore, though this view differs in the mode of explaining the subject, yet it contains all that is required, even according to the ordinary notions of the doctrine. The difference between the two explanations is simply this, that by the common exposition the Godhead is supposed to have consisted from all eternity of three persons, but according to the one now proposed, this triple personal subsistence has arisen from the circumstance that God has been pleased, in the Christian dispensation, in gracious condescension to human weakness, and as relating to human concerns, to multiply himself twofold in the person of our Lord, and in the distinct personal establishment of the Holy Spirit. And as this presents an intelligible, rational, and consistent view of the matter, it seems altogether fit to be adopted ; un-

less, indeed, it could be shewn, that there are passages which directly militate against it, and establish the notion of a plurality of persons existing from all eternity in the essence of the Godhead. It will now, therefore, be right to consider the objections that may be raised from texts which may seem to imply this. The three principal ones that can be supposed to countenance this notion, are Gen. i. 26. iii. 22. and 1 John v. 7. the consideration of which will sufficiently shew how all similar ones are to be understood. In Gen. i. 26. we read, “And God said, Let us make man.” Now, as the scheme of human redemption by Christ was a matter which was planned in the Divine mind before the creation of the world,* and inasmuch as this scheme was founded on the intended exhibition of the mind of God in the person of Christ, and in the separate personality of the Holy Spirit, it was not at all unsuitable that God should be described as declaring his will as emanating from a plurality of persons. Indeed, it was necessary for the

* 1 Cor. ii. 7.

sake of clearness and consistency, that this should be done from the first; in order rightly to prepare men for forming a just conception of the scheme, when it should take effect. Neither is it out of character for the historian to speak thus by anticipation. It is observable that he does so, in this and the two next verses, with regard to the female, of whose formation we have no account till the 22nd verse of the next chapter. The verses stand thus, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion,” &c.—“So God created man in his *own* image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”—“And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply,” &c. These remarks will serve to explain Gen. iii. 22. where we read, “And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us.” As it was intended that the Christian scheme should be exhibited in due time, it was just as necessary that men should, in the meanwhile, be habituated to think of God under a notion of

a plurality of persons as of a unity.—As to the text of 1 John v. 7. It has been, indeed, a matter of no small discussion, whether it is genuine; but into that inquiry it is unnecessary to enter. Because, even supposing it to be genuine, if it is interpreted conformably to the view which has been here given of the doctrine of the Trinity, it will be found to have a very plain and consistent meaning, to which no reasonable objection can be taken. “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.” If we admit, according to the proposed exposition, that the Word, and the Holy Ghost, are a twofold distinct personal establishment of the Divine mind, the existence of the three heavenly witnesses and their perfect unity, are easily accounted for.

I am not aware that there are any other texts which call for notice under this head. But, on the other hand, it may be observed, that there are some texts relating to “the Son,” which cannot be explained consist-

ently with the ordinary view of the doctrine, to say the least, without a very forced construction. Of these, it will be sufficient to mention two which are well known. In Mark xiii. 32. Our Lord, speaking of his second Advent, says, “But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” This limited knowledge of the Son, is hardly consistent with the ordinary view of the doctrine of the Trinity, in which he is supposed to have been always a person in the Godhead and equal to the Father. Various solutions have been attempted of the difficulty in this text; but which it is unnecessary to state, since the present exposition of the doctrine is placed on such different ground. But, it may be observed, that, according to this view of the doctrine, which supposes the Divinity of our Lord to have been founded on the circumstance of the Divine influence on his mind, and this influence, though at all times entire, to have been only to the extent of the occasion, there is nothing unsuitable in supposing

the Divine communication to him to be proportionate to the exigency. And, therefore, there would not seem to be any thing unreasonable in supposing our Lord not to have been, at the time in question and previously to his resurrection,* fully informed of a matter which was not essential to the exercise of his ministry ; that ministry being, as we know it was, of a limited kind.†—The other text is Col. i. 15. “ Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born (or first-begotten) of every creature.” Of this text also, there have been different interpretations, which have appeared more or less satisfactory to different persons. It is unnecessary, for the reason above given, to enter into a particular inquiry respecting them, on this occasion. What I have to remark is, that, according to the spiritual sense which I have given to the term, “ begotten,” the description is altogether appropriate to our Lord. But, then, I should add, that the word “ creature ” is also to be taken in a spiritual and evangelical sense, as relating to the creation of the mind

* Compare Heb. i. 6.

† Matt. xv. 24.

anew. I apprehend that the word, “creature,” when applied strictly for the explanation of the Gospel scheme of redemption, signifies a person whose mind is under Divine grace. But, then, we must not suppose the operation of Divine grace to be limited to the Christian dispensation, but to have been, at all times, in a degree, imparted to heathens; whereby they were enabled to make a certain advance in virtue and piety: an instance of this we have in Cornelius the Centurion. In truth, it signifies, if I mistake not, a person with that previous good disposition of the mind which is requisite for receiving the Gospel; and which disposition is alluded to in St. Luke’s declaration, “as many believed as were ordained (or, rather, disposed) to eternal life.”* This I take to be the latent sense of the word “creature” in the Apostolical Commission; by which it is tacitly intimated, that, though the Gospel is openly preached to all mankind; it is, from its nature, in strictness, addressed to those only who have this good disposition of mind;

* Acts xiii. 48.

without which they will not be able to benefit by it, since it is a system which acts, not by force, but by persuasion. And it is in this sense that the word must be taken in ver. 23, of this chapter; where the Gospel is said to have been preached to "every creature under heaven." In the ordinary sense of the term, this could hardly be maintained. But after the Gospel had been, by St. Paul's indiscriminate preaching of it, delivered to the world at large, it might very justly be said, in this peculiar sense, to have been preached to "every creature under heaven," that is, to every one with that good disposition of mind which results from the Divine influence; since by this extension of the preaching of the Gospel, it was now within his reach. It is in this sense then of a human mind under Divine grace and, as in Christ, created anew, that the word creature is here to be understood. Christ was the beginning of a new Creation. The expressions then in the first clause of this verse, "Who is the image of the invisible God," I apprehend describe the perfect union of the man Christ Jesus with the

Divine nature: he was not, as the first Adam was, merely “in the image and after the likeness of God;” but he was altogether, as to us, “the express image of his person;”^{*} and it is in order to shew how he became so, that the latter clause, “the first-begotten of every creature,” would seem to be added; that it was by the union of his incorrupt human nature to the Divine:† and then, the use is to intimate to us the means, by which, through him, we may be restored to a resemblance to the Divine nature. It is added in v. 16, which, it should be observed, connects with v. 14, the intermediate one being parenthetical “For by (rather in) him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him.” All which is conformable to the view which I have here exhibited of our Lord, as the Incarnate Word of God; and

• Heb. i. 3.

† See in p. 70—76 observations, on the expressions, “the power of the Highest,” &c.

as being, as such, not only the essential principle of existence to all things, but the means by which all things both natural and moral were called into existence; and being also, the true end and purpose for which they were made, the natural creation being subservient to the moral.

But after all, the novelty alone of the exposition, may be urged as an objection. It may be said, that no intimation of any such view of the subject is to be found in the writings of the Fathers of the first three centuries, who appear, though with some variety, to have entertained the common notion of the doctrine. And, as their opinions are much relied upon, and in some respects very justly, it will be right to examine this point, and to shew that the weight of their authority does not at all affect the question in hand. It will be readily admitted, that the belief of these first Christians could hardly have been other than conformable to the expressions used by the Apostles respecting Christ and the Holy Spirit. But then, it should be remembered, that all that can be gathered

from the Apostolical language, as recorded in the Scriptures, is, that the Apostles used certain expressions which go to establish the points of the Divinity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. It does not appear that they gave any explanation of the exact sense in which their expressions on these points were to be understood. They have not stated explicitly how Christ is God or how the Holy Spirit is a person. Every believer therefore would have to form his own notions upon them. And hence, it would not follow that these uninspired contemporaries and immediate successors of the apostles, though agreeing with them as to the substance of the doctrine of the Trinity, would explain it in the same way that they would have done. In fact, if we examine the opinions of these early fathers respecting the doctrine, we shall find them to be merely a succession of efforts to make out, by the exercise of their reason on the apostolical and scriptural statements of the doctrine, the real meaning of those statements; which had never been

openly explained, though the incidental remarks of the scriptural writers in allusion to the doctrine, if duly considered, afford a clue to their meaning. And, therefore, though these early Christians are good authority as to the substance of the doctrine, yet they have no claim to bind us to their opinions of the way in which the doctrine is to be explained, as if their opinions were in reality derived from the apostles. At the same time, it will be admitted that their opinions are entitled to due consideration, as those of persons of much piety earnestly engaged in the study of the Scriptures. Still this part of the subject is left open to every Christian to exercise his judgment upon. Much as we may respect the characters of our elder brethren in Christ, we are no where in Scripture enjoined to yield up our reason to them. In truth, as I have before remarked, submission to ancient and ecclesiastical authority on points of doctrine, can be justly claimed, only on conviction that the doctrines are supported

by the Scriptures. The very nature and scriptural character of our religion requires that a Christian's belief should be the result of the free exercise of his judgment; and that he should be able, not only as to the whole subject, but as to the particulars, to give a "a reason of the hope that is in him."* Now, though no person of a sound way of thinking, would, in forming his judgment on the present question, neglect the opinions of these first Christians, yet the degree of deference due to them on this subject is, perhaps, less than on any other of the Christian doctrines; since it is well known that they were, from the beginning, misled as to their views of this doctrine by their previous acquaintance with the Grecian philosophy. This is allowed to have been the case by Bishop Horsley. He says, "It must be acknowledged, that the first converts from the Platonic school, took advantage of the resemblance between the evangelic and Platonic doctrine, on the subject of the Godhead, to apply the principles of their old philosophy to the

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

explication and the confirmation of the articles of their faith. They defended it by arguments drawn from Platonic principles; they even propounded it in Platonic language: which to themselves and their contemporaries was the most familiar and intelligible, that could be employed on so abstruse a subject.”* We see, then, whence it was that the custom arose, of applying the Scriptural expressions relating to the Divinity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit, to the essential nature of the Godhead. This custom thus established in the Christian church, has been ever since followed by succeeding expositors. I have humbly ventured to take other, and, as I conceive, more appropriate ground for my inquiry, and to interpret these expressions strictly in reference to the Christian scheme of Redemption. This circumstance will sufficiently account for the novelty of the exposition. At the same time, it will shew that, however different the general result of my view of the subject may be from that of these early

* Horsley's Charge to the Clergy of St. Alban's, part iv. s. 2.

interpreters, it is, strictly speaking, not in opposition to it. I am the more desirous of stating this, as I am not of the number of these who estimate their labours at a low rate. On the contrary, I am of opinion, that they did the best they could, according to their knowledge at the time, by firmly upholding in their writings the Scriptural expressions on the subject, and, by so doing, preserving the essential part of the doctrine uninjured. The consequence has been, that, from thence and through the subsequent Creeds formed on their writings, the doctrine has come down to us in its entireness and purity: and for this we are greatly indebted to them. Their chief object in the formation of the creeds, seems to have been to combine together, as well as they could, all the Scriptural expressions relating to the subject, without being solicitous to inquire, how far these phrases, thus associated, would admit of a satisfactory explanation. This was, assuredly, under the circumstances, a wise and judicious mode of proceeding. And the excellency of the forms which have been thus produced, ap-

pears from this, that they are in a great measure applicable to different views of the subject.* Indeed, I think that it will

* An attention to this circumstance may, perhaps, in some degree, enable us to perceive how it was that a person of so acute and comprehensive a mind as Bishop Horsley, should have continued to treat of the doctrine of the Trinity according to its ordinary exposition, though the meaning which he has given to the two Scriptural titles of the Redeemer leads, as it has appeared, to so different a one. For since in the view of the doctrine which is founded on this peculiar sense of these titles, the doctrine itself remains essentially unchanged, there was no reason for his doubting the accuracy of the common exposition, unless he had specially turned his mind to consider the precise effect which the sense that he had given to the titles would have on it: and this, there is no reason to conclude that he had done. Indeed, judging from experience of the painful effort of mind requisite to take any other than the accustomed view of the doctrine, I should say that nothing but an extreme case of urgency could have induced him to set about it. But, at any rate, however difficult it may be to account for the oversight, I think, that it must be admitted that, according to Bishop Horsley's own explication of the titles, the supposition of the existence of three persons from all eternity in the essence of the Godhead is useless, and a mere incumbrance to the doctrine. And, certainly, his own high example would not on such a point sanction an implicit submission to any mere human authority, however much entitled such authority might be, as his undoubtedly was, to the greatest attention and just respect.

With regard to his observations on Matt. xvi. 18, 19. (See Serm. xiii.) in which he infers that St. Peter's confes-

be found, on examination, that, with the sole exception of the phrases expressive of Christ as begotten before the worlds, they are applicable to the view of the subject which has been here set forth.* Yet, as to these phrases, perhaps less objection will be raised, when it is considered, that the term “begotten,” as applied to Christ, is indicative of his Divine union; and that

sion of Christ as “the Son of the living God,” amounts to a full acknowledgment of the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil; I would remark, that it is only in that sense of the phrase “Son of God” which the Bishop has given, that is, as signifying a man in spiritual union with Divinity, that St. Peter can be supposed to have acknowledged Christ as “God manifest in the flesh.” To suppose him to have done it in any other sense, is inconsistent with the scriptural records; more especially, with his subsequent denial of our Lord. It is not possible to think that this could have happened, had the Apostle entertained the common notion of our Lord’s existence from all-eternity as a Son and the second person in the Essence of the Godhead. The truth is, the confession of Christ to be the Son of God, could in that early stage of the preaching of the Gospel, be considered only as a belief in the perfect righteousness of his character. And, as I apprehend, the confession of this truth, as being certain evidence of Christ’s Divinity, is the rock on which he here promises to build his church.

* See Appendix.

this union, though it took place at the period of the Incarnation of the Divine Word, is properly the ground of his claim to Eternal existence. However, in strictness and truth, each of the expressions can be only separately applied to Christ, according to the usage of Scripture; he was “begotten” or “first-begotten,” and he was “before the worlds,” but they cannot on any Scriptural authority be used of him unitedly.

I have thus endeavoured to exhibit, with as much plainness as I could, what appears to me to be the true meaning of the Doctrine of the Trinity as it is delivered in the Scriptures. If this view were applied practically, it would be the means not only of proving more fully its truth, but of shewing the peculiar value of the Doctrine itself, in respect of the influence which it may be expected to have on the conduct of a sincere Christian. I have, however, forbore to pursue the subject in that way, and have confined myself to the single inquiry into the meaning of the Doctrine as deducible from Scripture; as it seemed best,

in so new a case, to take the simplest view of the subject that circumstances would admit of. Should that be found to be just, it may then be easily extended and enforced as to all its beneficial consequences. I profess not to have given a perfect view of the subject, perhaps I can hardly hope to have done more than draw public attention to it. But, such as it is, I present it as an humble offering to the Church of Christ, with a heartfelt sense of gratitude for the Divine blessing which has enabled me, through much painful doubt and difficulty, to persevere and conclude my labour, and with a sincere hope that it may, in its degree, conduce to the Divine Glory and to Christian edification.

APPENDIX.

I HAVE thought that it may be useful to subjoin our three Creeds with explanations according to the view which has been here taken of the doctrine of the Trinity. As, however, these forms were constructed under so different a view of the subject, they are clearly not such as would have been originally planned for the present one; and it may, therefore, naturally be supposed that there may be something forced in adapting them to it. But yet, as the doctrine itself, notwithstanding the exposition is varied, remains, in this view, precisely the same; it is certainly desirable to apply the view to the established forms of faith, and which, I think, it will be seen may be done without inconvenience.

THE APOSTLES' CREED.

I BELIEVE in God the Father (*so called, as being the source of just thinking by influencing the mind*) Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son (*his only-begotten Son, the only human being entirely under Divine influence*) our Lord: who was (*miraculously*) conceived by (*means of*) the Holy Ghost, (*through the intention of the Divine mind taking effect in a Virgin's womb as predicted by the prophet, Isaiah vii. 14.*) born of

the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried ; He descended into hell ; The third day he rose from the dead ; He ascended into Heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost ; *(the establishment of the Divine Mind in a state of distinct Spiritual existence, conformably to our Lord's promise, John xiv. 16, &c.)* The Holy Catholick Church ; The Communion of Saints, The forgiveness of sins, The Resurrection of the *(Spiritual)* body *(according to what is said by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 44)* ; And the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED.

I BELIEVE in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth ; And of all things visible and invisible : And in one Lord Jesus Christ ; the only-begotten Son of God *(the only human being entirely under Divine influence)* ; Begotten of his Father ; *(being entirely under Divine influence through the Divine union which took place first, at his birth, and secondly, at his resurrection)* ; Before all worlds *(being the articulate expression of the will of God or the Divine Word ; and, as such, in existence before the worlds or temporary dispensations were formed)* ; God of God *(God through the Divine union with the Godhead)* ; Light of Light *(the source of Divine Revelation through the Divine revelation made by him as the Divine Word)* ; Very God of very God *(virtually the true God, through Divine union with the true God)* ; Begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father *(though consisting of two natures, yet being through Divine influence united to God and not merely a human being created by the will of God, he was, as to*

the leading part of his constitution, substantially the same Spiritual Being as God. By whom (by means of whom as the Divine Word) all things were made; Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven (became as the Divine Word a visible representation of God upon earth); And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary (and was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, through the predicted Divine intention on that point taking effect upon her); And was made man (and was thus born a human being). And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost (the establishment of the Divine mind in a state of distinct existence) the Lord and Giver of (spiritual eternal) life: Who (as the Divine mind) proceedeth from the Father and the Son; Who (being, though in a condition of distinct existence, in perfect union with the Father and the Son) with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified (as one God); Who spake by the Prophets (was as the mind of God made known by the mouth of the prophets). And I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead; And the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED.

WITH regard to this Creed, but few remarks will be requisite, as it will be easily seen that the terms of it are not inapplicable to this view of the doctrine, according to the explanations already given.

WHOSOEVER will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic (*or Christian*) Faith. (*Called Catholic, because Christianity is matter of universal concern.*)

Which Faith (*whatever it may be found to consist in*), except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly; (*and this because Christian Faith is the essential principle of Christianity.*) And the Catholic Faith (*in special reference to God*) is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity (*that is, one God under the notion of three persons united in one*); neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (*being alike the mind of God*) is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal: Such as the Father is, such is the Son (*through the Divine union*), and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son (*in respect of his Divinity*) uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible (*unlimited*), the Son (*as to his Divinity*) incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son (*through the Divine union*) eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal; and yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, or three uncreated; but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise, the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty; and yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise, the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord; and yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity, to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the

Catholic Religion, to say, there be three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten: The Son (*in respect of his Divinity*) is of the Father, alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity, none is (*in respect of the Divine Nature*) afore or after other; none is greater, or less than another; but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together; and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He, therefore, that will be saved, must (*according to our views of Scripture*) thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also believe rightly the Incarnation (*of the Word of God in the person*) of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, is God and Man: God of the Substance of the Father; Begotten (*through the Divine union*); Before the worlds (*as the Divine Word*), and Man of the Substance of his Mother born in the world. Perfect God, and perfect Man; of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood. Who although he be God and man, yet he is not two (*things*) but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person: for (*by way of illustration*) as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; who (*as man in union with God*) suffered for our salvation, descended into Hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended

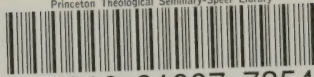
into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming, all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account of their own works. And they that have done good, shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic Faith; which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot (*according to our views of Scripture*) be saved. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

THE END.

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